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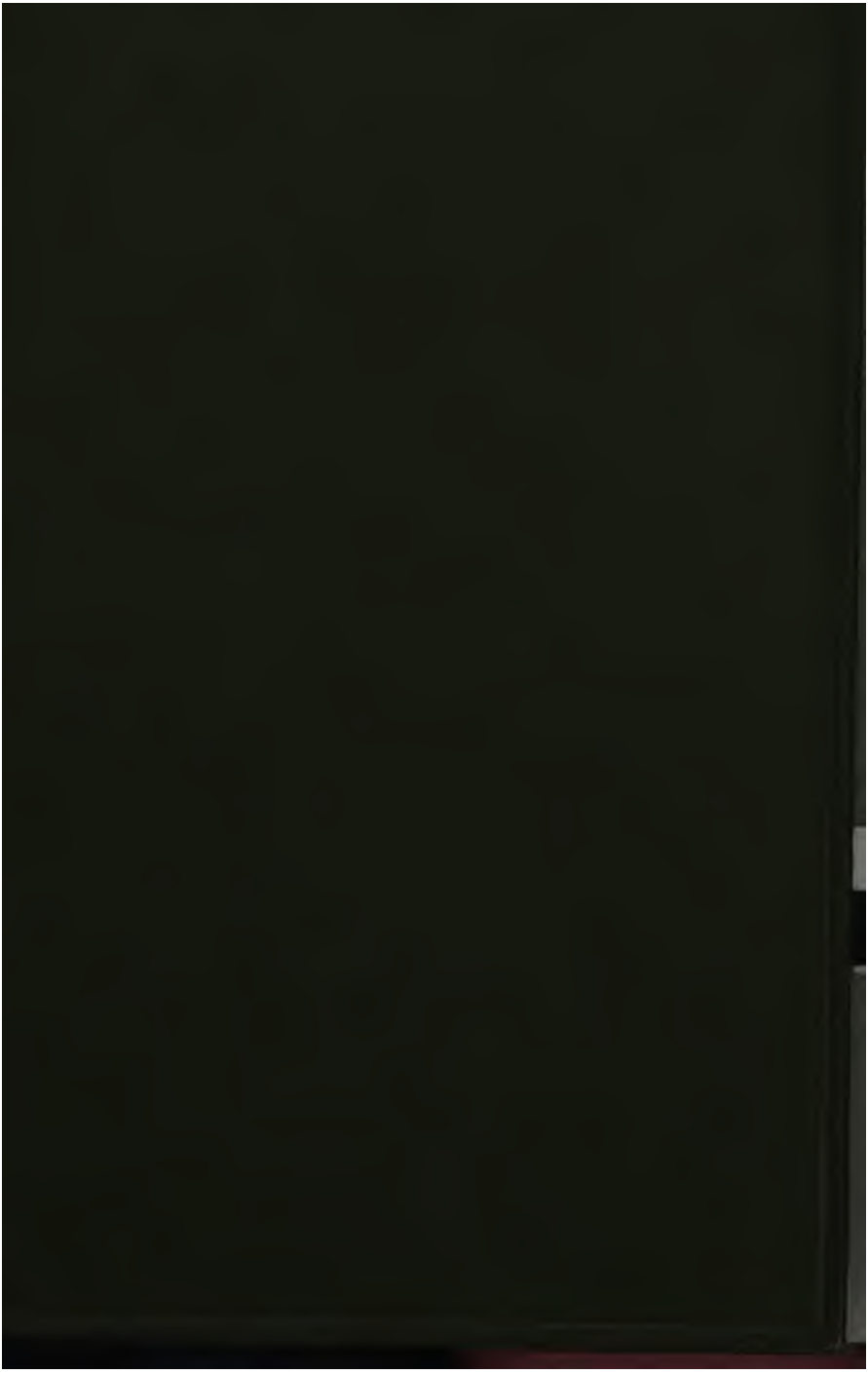

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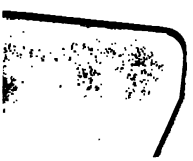

BAD LUCK.

A Novel.

BY

ALBANY DE FONBLANQUE,

AUTHOR OF "A TANGLED SKEIN," "CUT ADRIFT," ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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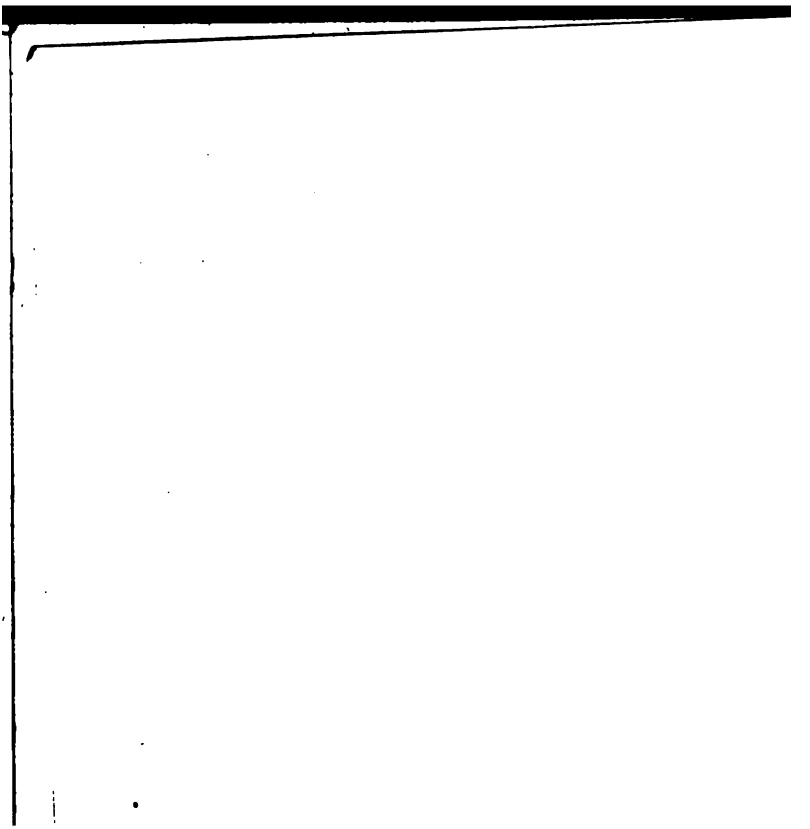


BAD LUCK.

CHAPTER I.

COCK ROBIN.

A SUMMER shower rattles against the window-panes of the room in which the Honourable and Reverend Frank Marston, Vicar of Laremouth, and his daughter Madge, are taking their breakfast; and, but for the usual sounds which clink an accompaniment to mastication, nothing else disturbs the silence in which their meal is taken.

They have not quarrelled—they never do—and have plenty to say, only neither of them likes to begin; Madge, because she has not made up her mind how to break the ice, and her father because he is one of those poor creatures who, having shirked a difficulty, go away almost as happy as though they had met and conquered it. As soon as he has finished his second cup, he rises with a sigh of relief and makes for his study to look out a sermon that will do for Sunday; and Madge, slinging her garden hat upon her arm, saunters out through the hall to feed the robins in the garden.

It is high spring-time. The flowers are saying grace after rain; the air is full of freshness and perfume. The earth sends up its thanks in a low, tender sobbing. A laburnum waves golden tassels over the

girl's head as she sinks into her favourite rustic seat, and the grass beyond the strip of gravel at her feet is all a-glitter with rainbow-tinted drops. It is high spring-time also in her heart. Upon that very seat, not four days ago, the arms of her true love have clasped her for the first time, and she has shyly kissed him back his troth. What the bright sunshine and soft rain are doing for her flowers that clasp and that kiss are doing for her life. It is bursting into bud. She has eaten and drank; she has slept, laughed, and cried, hoped for this and feared at that—but not *lived* till now. And with this new life—in the midst of its budding joys, its dimly whispered mysteries—comes trouble. She sinks almost wearily into the old, damp, uncomfortable seat, and, out of sheer force of habit, begins to crumble up the bread

she had put into her pocket at breakfast, and to throw it for the robins. She has fed several generations of robins at exactly the same time, and in precisely the same place. Giving them their breakfast comes as naturally as taking her own, and she does it mechanically.

She has not long to wait. Mrs. Robin hops out from under the evergreen hedge, and begins at once to pick up her crumbs. Cock Robin appears soon afterwards, and has to strut about, throw up his head, puff out his waistcoat, and put himself *en evidence* before he condescends to eat. "Happy little things," Madge muses, as she throws more crumbs, "*you* have no troubles. No one hates *you* to be happy."

Now Cock Robin is an impostor of the lowest order, but it won't do to say so in face of all the pretty myths that have been

composed about him. Do you know the prettiest of all?—that which tells how he came by his crimson breast? Has no one told you how, long ago, he was only a common brown bird, until one dreadful day when three men were led out of Jerusalem and nailed to crosses on Mount Calvary. Then he alone of all the birds of the air, knowing WHO was tortured in the midst, flew up with his little heart breaking with love and anger, and strove with all his puny strength to draw forth the cruel nails, getting his breast glorified in the struggle with a sacred stain which marks his race for ever.

This was not told me in my youth, and I am glad of it. I should have pursued the tale with materialistic inquiries which would have rubbed all the poetry out of it; but I was always taught to respect Cock

Robin as "God's bird," commanded never to take his nest or throw stones at him, and so on; and, if the truth be told, I dare say I took it out of the other birds to make up for this reservation in his favour. Then there are his services as undertaker to the Babes in the Wood to his credit, and the sad legend of his death and burial to excite our sympathy for his untimely end, and prove the universal respect in which he was held by contemporary insects, fishes and birds, and even by superior members of the animal kingdom. By the by, I wonder why those gentlemen who improve (?) our nursery literature do not add a moral to this story (which, as it stands, gives a lamentable immunity to crime), by adding a verse to show who hung that murderous sparrow with his own bow-string, or, if capital punishment be ob-

jectionable, who sent him to a Reformatory and made a dear, sweet bird of him.

In presence of this testimony to the gentleness and popularity of Cock Robin in the abstract, it is only to be whispered that in reality he is possessed of the worst vices; is selfish, conceited, lazy, and, for his size, the most quarrelsome piece of feathered flesh and blood to be found. Madge Marsden is not a student of ornithological psychology. For her, Cock Robin lives and dies, and picks up crumbs in a halo of romance; and "Happy little things," she muses, "you have no troubles. No one hates *you* to be happy."

The words are hardly out of her lips when there is a flutter in the evergreens and Cock Robin, No. 2, makes his appearance. He also must have his swagger and

stare about him; and, this done, pretends that he has come after crumbs. But Cock Robin, No. 1, knows better, and falls upon him furiously. Over and over they roll on the gravel uttering shrill cries of rage or pain, and fighting with bill, claw, and wing, as though they had been mortal enemies all their lives, and there were only one hen of their species in the world. Anon they spring up into the air, and fly, still fighting, into the laburnum, where they clinch and roll from bough to bough a palpitating ball of feathers and fury, till they come to earth again so lost to every other sense but mutual hate and the desire to mangle each other, that they let Madge pick them up and actually pursue their fury in her hand.

"Wicked little things," she says now; "how *can* you be so spiteful? If you don't

let go your claws I shall hurt you, naughty birds! Is not the garden big enough for you both?"

She gets no reply from the combatants, and having gently disengaged beak and talon, sends one to the left and another to the right; and their little unpleasantness is at an end for that day. But she is soon to learn that the garden is not big enough for them both, and that when passions similar to those which make them foes, enter the human breast, this great round globe itself is too small to hold the pair.

In the meantime Madame Robin has flown up into a neighbouring tree from which she views the combat with much complaisance, pluming herself the while as some queen of beauty in the days of chivalrie might have sat upon her throne

and settled the pearls on her fair bosom, whilst gallant knights — good friends, perhaps, yesterday—fought and bled and died for her smile in the lists below.

When Madge had stopped the fight, by dispersing the fighters, Madame Robin flew off with one of them; *which*, I cannot say, but be sure it was the best bird. The best fighter would probably be the best provider, have the strongest draw at a reluctant worm, be the ablest nest builder, and so on. It may be that this one was her old love, let us hope so; but I am afraid that the Brian de Bois Guilberts and other muscular adorers, very often get the best of it in love's campaign, be lady or bird the prize; and that even in our own delightful days the suitor who has the strongest draw (not at a worm, but on a banker), is not unfrequently able to get

Sir Winfred of Ivanhoe shown to the door. So let us not be too hard upon a poor little brown birdie if she did follow the instincts of her kind, and fly off with (sentimentally speaking) the wrong mate.

Madge went back to her seat and took a letter from her pocket, where the bread had been, and read it over for about the ninth time. It was directed to her father who had given it to her without a word of comment shortly before they sat down to breakfast; and its contents, which had caused that meal to pass in silence as already described, were as follows:

"London, April 29th, 1875.

"MY DEAR MR. MARSTON,

"Your letter has so surprised and distressed me, that for the present I cannot trust myself to write more than that

I positively decline to hold any communication, direct or indirect, with or concerning a person who has acted as Mr. Ellicott has done. I cannot imagine how any man, much less one who called himself my friend, could have been guilty of such utter meanness and treachery.

"Yours sincerely,

"H. L. WYBERT.

"The Hon. and Rev. F. Marston,
"The Vicarage,
"Laremouth."

There were no signs of anger or haste in the penmanship. The lines were straight, the writing clear, the punctuation exact. There was deliberation in the crossing of every *t*, the dotting of every *i*. Mr. Henry Lane Wybert was always deliberate; but he seldom indulged in such strong language as "utter meanness and treachery."

To tell his connection with the Hon. and Rev. Frank Marston, involves a short history of that gentleman's life. He was a very superior man, had been second wrangler and Smith's prizeman of his year; had edited several Greek tragedies, written letters to the *Times* about the transit of Venus, and published a work upon Dynamics as known to the Phœnicians, which delighted the savants, and half ruined his publisher.

A very superior man, I repeat, at Cambridge, and amongst learned recluses whom he met at social science and other meetings, held for the purpose of mutual boreing; but elsewhere, but for merely practical people, he was a man who lived in a muddle, which he had not the moral courage to face; and who would die in a muddle, out of which his executors would

have to find their way as best they could. Logarithms were child's play to him; but a butcher who charged him six and ninepence for seven pounds of mutton at elevenpence halfpenny a pound, would find an easy victim.

Of course, he was robbed right and left, and a mania for bill transactions, dabblings in stocks and shares of the most "wild-cat" order, kept him in a chronic state of debt.

But though unfortunate in everything else, he drew a prize in the lottery of wedlock. He managed somehow to win the love of a lady with a small fortune and a large stock of common sense. Her money saved the living from sequestration, and her good management kept its incumbent straight—as long as she lived. She got him pupils, and, what is more, kept them

for him; increased his income, reduced his expenditure, and obtained a promise that he would pay ready money and never speculate again.

Mr. Henry Wybert was one of those pupils, and kept up the acquaintance of the preceptor of his youth, until their original positions were reversed. At the age of three-and-twenty, this young gentleman had a very clear, cool head on his shoulders; at the age of fifty, his former tutor was as green as when he first donned cap and gown.

When Mrs. Marston died, and trouble entered the vicarage once more Wybert became the lecturer and Marston the lectured. Old Doctor Wybert had paid a hundred and fifty guineas a year for the honour of having his son helped over the

pons asinorum by an honourable and reverend, and now the quondam pupil was rendering much more practical services for no fee except the sensation of superiority, which was pleasant to him, and the reputation of being intimate with the brother of a peer, which flattered a somewhat servile mind.

The trouble which followed Mrs. Marston's death was this. Her twelve thousand pounds—the interest of which had gone to keep up the house—was "appointed" between her two daughters, Isabel and Margaret, "come of age or marry;" and the Court of Chancery would not allow more than half the income to be applied for their support and maintenance as minors. Alas! that promise to pay ready money and abjure speculation had not been kept, and the trustees felt bound

to say some very disagreeable things through their counsel at the hearing.

Then the eldest "infant," Isabel, married, against all advice and remonstrance, a man who "hadn't a shilling," and away went her contribution—and there were no pupils now. Brimful of learning, Mr. Marston could not teach that twice five was ten. He might have got on with young men of twenty, who wanted to learn, and would help him to teach them, but careless boys irritated him. He would get furious with them over a clumsily-construed line, and order them out of the room. So whenever they wanted a holiday they knew how to get it. What they did learn they were taught in the drawing-room; but when the kind hand which led them to be, as was truly said, "such gentlemanly boys," was cold, and

they were left to run wild amongst fishermen and gamekeepers, the verdict changed. One by one they were taken away, and the deserted master had not the energy to seek for others. He had no energy for anything. He did not even run into debt —he sauntered into it—and made no effort to retrieve his steps.

It requires a long time and much provocation to make the tradesmen of a small sea-side town put their parson in the county court; and certainly the butchers, and bakers, and corn-chandlers of Laremouth gave their pastor plenty of law—in one sense of the phrase—before they sued him. What were they to do with a man who would not see them, or answer their letters, and whose motto appeared to be "Shirk! Shirk! Shirk!"? Well, the fruits of shirking soon appeared.

Tradesmen's angry notes ripened into lawyers' letters, these into summonses, these into judgments, remonstrances by the Bishop, and threats of sequestration. In such need, a friend who could bring some order into the muddlement; oppose what was unjust and concede what was correct; who could raise money enough to pay off small and pressing debts, get this creditor to give time, and that to accept smaller instalments; one who, in a word, would *face it*—was a friend indeed, and Henry Wybert was the man.

Madge was fifteen when this crisis occurred, but, beyond a vague idea that things were going wrong, and that Wybert (whom she remembered as one of "the boys") was somehow or other engaged in putting them to rights, it made no impression upon her. How, as time went

on, the boy whose ears she had seen boxed became a power at the vicarage, she did not seek to enquire. Her father sought his advice, and submitted to his dictation. Nothing could be done without Henry. If he became too fond of exercising his power, she did not perceive it. If he were a tyrant, he was at least a beneficent one.

Such small festivities as were held at the vicarage were arranged to suit his visits. His comings necessitated the purchase of new raiment, and his goings were made eras from which dates were calculated. What was known in Mrs. Marston's time as the *Guests' Chamber* became "Mr. Wybert's room," and was constantly occupied. His influence grew, you see, as she grew, and every change for the better in their mode of living was associated with it.

As for the vicar, he could not order a new coat, or have the ponies clipped, without consulting Henry. I mention the ponies because this will show you that Mr. Marston's fortunes had brightened under the careful nursing of his former pupil. Indeed, at the time when Madge was separating those pugnacious cock robins, her father was almost out of debt. He drank his tea that morning without fear of the grocer, and did not hurry off to his study then—as he had often done before—to avoid such a message as "The butcher sends his duty, sir, and could he see you?"

He was out of debt; but not out of the old habit of shirking difficulties. The present difficulty was contained in Wybert's letter, which we left Madge reading. It had been given to her on the stairs as she

left her room, and she had glanced through it hastily to see what nice things the good genius of the house would write about her lover, and we know what she found. "Utter meanness and treachery!" Fraser Ellicott mean? Fraser Ellicott a traitor? Traitor to whom—to what? If the man she had been brought up to believe in so thoroughly had written to say that the Archbishop of Canterbury had joined the Mormons, or that Mr. Martin Tupper was the real author of all the works attributed to Bret Harte, habit would have brought credence. But evil of Fraser Ellicott—*her* Fraser, her man of men, her prince whose kiss had awakened her out of the trance of childhood into the noonday of woman's life—that was not to be believed though fifty Henry Wyberts swore it to be true.

Still there was enough of the old influence remaining to make her feel very unhappy. Fraser had left Laremouth soon after his proposal, for propriety sake, and to give Mr. Marston an opportunity of making enquiries as to his character and position. He laughed, in his hearty way, when told that Wybert was to be his sponsor.

"What does he know about me? no harm, I'll swear!" he laughed; "so that's all right, darling, and as for the tin, I'll make my guardian write directly I get to town."

So the course of true love for this pair seemed as smooth as the Great Northern Railway track, till that mysterious reply of the good genius came. Poor Madge got indignant over it, and cried over it, and wondered what on earth it could

mean; at last she took heart of grace, and determined to fret no more, but have it out with all concerned, and first with her father.

CHAPTER II.

THE FLAG OF REVOLT.

THE Vicar had looked out his sermon for Sunday, and was making some alterations therein when Madge entered his study—a small room on the ground floor having two entrances, one from the house and the other from the garden; through which latter the family could make a short cut to service in rainy weather. She walks straight up to where he sits, and resting

two fingers, which tremble a little, on the edge of the writing-table, breaks the ice.

"Papa, dear, I want you to show me what you wrote to Henry!"

"Show you?"

"Yes—the copy, I mean."

"My love, you know how I dislike copying what I write. Yes, yes, I understand," he adds in a querulous tone, as he follows her glance towards a table upon which stands a copying machine gorgeous in crimson and gilding; "but it's of no use; very kind indeed of Henry to give it to me, and of course he's right about the propriety of keeping copies, only it never would act properly."

"Can you tell me what you said in your letter."

"Every word—that is, almost every

word," he replies brightening up, glad to get off so easily for his neglect of Henry's gift, which is in excellent order. "I told him what had taken place."

"Papa, dear, I want you to tell me the words you used. I cannot hope to understand his answer unless I know exactly what you wrote. I do so wish you had kept a copy."

"Well, so do I, now; but what *is* the use of wishing. I said 'Dear Henry,' you don't want the date, I suppose, it was the day before yesterday; I said 'Dear Henry, Mr. Ellicott has been staying here again;' no, I did not say 'here,' I said 'at his old quarters' or 'at the Harp and Crown,' I really forget which, and it does not matter, the sense is the same; 'and we have seen a great deal of him and like him very much. To-day he gave me a great sur-

prise. He told me he had proposed for dear Madge, and that she had accepted him if I would consent.' Well, that was not exactly what passed," the Vicar continued with a grim smile. "He blurted out that you had promised to be his wife, and took all the rest for granted; but that is what he meant I dare say. Then I wrote 'as he is your friend and you brought him here originally and introduced him to us and know all about his character and means, I apply to you at once for your opinion and advice, by which I shall, of course, be—be——'"

"Please go on."

"That was all."

"Did you say you would *of course* be guided by his opinion and advice?" Madge asks, getting pale and breathing quickly.

"I always take his advice, my dear; he is a very clear-headed man."

"But did you promise to do so this time?"

"Promise! really Madge, you are very captious to-day! There was no *promise.* It was only just a nice way of turning the sentence."

Madge heaves a deep sigh, and seats herself, swinging her garden hat to and fro, and grinding a hole through the carpet with the toe of her boot. Her father wriggles in his chair, takes a dip of ink, and tries to get back to his sermon; but Madge comes to the charge again.

"What do you make out of his answer?"

"That he is very angry, my dear."

"But what about? Why does he call Fraser mean and treacherous? why did he

bring him here as his friend if he was a bad man? If it had not been for him he would never have seen me or lov— and if there's to be misery it's all his fault; but he shall answer it himself. It *is* mean, and it *is* treacherous of him to run him down behind his back, and I don't believe a word he says."

The reader may find some difficulty in applying all the "hes" and "hims" of excited Madge to the right person. If people do not talk like leading articles in this story, it is their fault not mine.

Madge understood what she said, and emphasized it. The Vicar understood it also, and hastened to the defence of his idol.

"Well, we must wait and see. The poor fellow says he is surprised and distressed at—at something you know. Why,

those are his words, 'Your letter has so surprised and distressed me, that for the present I cannot trust myself to write.' I wish he hadn't written. Perhaps he wishes so himself now. And another thing: it may be as he says (oh! he's not a man to make rash assertions). He may have learned something about Mr. Ellicott to his disadvantage since he introduced him here."

"Then why does he not say what it is?" asks Madge.

"My dear, there are things which you ought not to hear."

"He writes to you—not to me," says Madge. "Besides," she goes on, taking up the letter by the extreme point of one of its corners as though it were some stinging insect, and reading it a yard off; he 'declines to hold any communication,

direct or indirect, with or concerning a man who has acted as Mr. Ellicott has done.' What has he done? He don't say, and he won't say! Really, papa, this is treating us like children. Have you answered him?"

"No dear, not yet."

"But you will?"

"Well, really, now I consider, I don't think it requires a reply."

"Not requires a reply!" Madge exclaims, a rising sense of danger confusing her grammar.

"Certainly not," says the Vicar, trying to look as though he had made up his mind. "Our correspondence upon this head is concluded. I asked his opinion upon a certain point. He refuses to give it. I cannot force him, and so there is an end of the matter."

Madge came into her father's study resolved to be very prudent. Like many people who lead lonely lives she had a trick of talking to herself.

"You keep your temper, Madge, like a good girl," she said, as she opened the wicket which led from the garden into the churchyard; "and see if you can't slip in between papa and Henry, for it's not a bit of use to attack them together."

With this line of diplomacy in mind she eagerly accepts the reasons given by her father for not answering Mr. Wybert's letter, but doesn't let him see why.

"Perhaps it would be as well to let it drop," she replies, after a pause. "There's no use making mischief. Of course, Fraser would be very angry if we told him."

"Oh dear! he must never know—never!" cries the Vicar.

"The thing is too vague altogether to be noticed," Madge says, to confirm him. "I wonder what could have put Henry into such a bad temper. He deserves a good rating. And do you know, papa, I wish you would speak to him about being so dictatorial with me. I'm not a child now—not his child, any way. Fraser noticed how he snubs me and orders me about. It won't do *now*."

"Henry is very fond of you. I mean he takes a great interest in you," says the Vicar, getting red and avoiding her look. "It would be very ungrateful indeed to—to hurt his feelings."

"I don't want to hurt his feelings," Madge replies. "I only want him to mind his own business. Why, the last

time he was here he had the impertinence to lecture me upon what sort of boots I should wear."

"And he was quite right," said her father. "As a medical man, he understands the mischievous results of the present fashion. I am sure that his explanation was most lucid and satisfactory. You seemed to think so, too, at the time."

"It was uncalled-for and impertinent," Madge persists, shirking the concluding assertion, which was true. "What business was it of his how high my heels were? If he wanted to speak like a doctor, he should have waited till I consulted him as one, or he might have spoken privately to you. The idea of a young man like that, and no relation, making me hold up my foot before—well, he had better not do anything like it

again. Fraser told me it was as much as ever he could do to keep from punching his head."

"I ought to be deeply indebted to Mr. Ellicott for teaching you such lady-like language; and you will oblige me by not calling him *Fraser*," snaps the Vicar, who has been fidgeting more and more as Madge's flag of revolt rises, and, like all weak creatures, he takes refuge in anger.

"I merely repeated what he said, papa," Madge replies, with as much calmness as she can muster; "and I should be very sorry indeed if he should ever be similarly provoked. Perhaps he would not be able to keep his temper next time; and this is one reason why I hope you will give Henry a hint not to meddle about me any more."

"He will do what is right and proper without any hints," is her father's pompous reply.

"Well, I trust he will, for all our sakes. And now, papa, please tell me what you mean by asking me not to call Fraser, Fraser. When Bell was engaged to Horace, she always called him Horace."

"But you are not engaged to Fra—to Mr. Ellicott," moans the Vicar. "It was perfectly clearly understood, Margaret—and you know it—that until my inquiries were satisfactorily answered, there was to be no sort of engagement."

"Yes; but you told him that you would make those inquiries only as a matter of form."

"My dear love, one is obliged to employ such *façons de parler*—politeness demands them; at least, the politeness *I* was taught,

before gentlemen talked about punching heads!"

"Papa, dear, you made it a matter of form by consulting Henry, who knows no more than we do about him since he was a boy in jackets. If you were not satisfied, and really wanted to find out all about him, why didn't you write to Uncle Joe?"

"I will not permit you to catechise me in this manner. It's undutiful, and—and improper. I repeat, there is no engagement between you and Mr. Ellicott until —there is no engagement *at all.* There!"

"May I write to Uncle Joe? he knows everybody, or can know if he likes," pleads poor Madge. "Or, better, will you write to Fra—to Mr. Ellicott, and ask him to refer you to somebody?"

"Perhaps—I don't know—I must con-

sider," her father stammers, wiping his flushed face, and presenting a picture of irresolution, vexation, and helplessness. "Really, Margaret, this persistence is very indelicate; and after Henry's letter——"

"It is the commonest fair play to push inquiries at once," she interrupts, with raised colour and kindling eyes.

"If you will *only* leave me alone, dear, I will do everything that is fair," he pleads. "I will write to Henry, and see if I can get his consent."

"*His* consent?"

"Well, well; get him to withdraw, or modify—his opposition."

"Why, good gracious, papa! What has he to oppose? What business is it of his whom I marry?"

"I have consulted him on the subject, and it would be most rude—most im-

proper and unfriendly—to ignore his advice. You don't understand these things, Madge—indeed you don't."

"Then you are influenced by—this—*thing?*" Her lip curls, and she gives the letter we know of a flick with her finger-nail.

"To a certain extent—yes."

"Oh, I never heard of anything so unfair! You make me absolutely hate him!" she cries, starting up.

The flag of revolt is at the truck now. One little jerk, and it will "break" and flutter out in the breeze. Her father has wit enough left not to add that jerk. He explains that this "certain extent" does not go far. He does not retire from his position that the correspondence with the good genius is closed on this subject. He thinks Madge's idea of applying to Uncle

Joe a good one. He backs and he fills—he blows hot and cold. He orders his persistent daughter out of the room, and ends by begging her, with tears in his eyes, to write anything she pleases, and he will copy and send it.

You will perceive that Madge does not take after her father in disposition. She is one of those persons whom you call obstinate when they disagree with you, and firm when they take your side. The lonely life she led gave her a power of passive resistance. Slighted by her father, or snubbed by Mr. Henry Wybert, it was her habit to go away to a ledge on the very brink of the cliff, which she called her "thinking-place," where she would try them before a jury of crude and angry thoughts, and decide that the one was unjust, and the other odious.

She had no one to peel the bitter rind off a rebuke, and give her to taste of the good fruit within. No one to rub opinions with, and so polish them. No one to give her that most wholesome sensation, which sometimes finds vent in the exclamation, "*Oh, what a fool I am!*"

As for Wybert, she knows that his visits only last a few days, and so she endures him. As for the Vicar, she knows that, however vigorously he may forbid this or that to-day, it may be done or neglected to-morrow with impunity. All things come to those who wait, and so she used to wait, certain of her own way in the end.

She gets her own way about writing to Uncle Joe, and takes it to that thinking-place of hers. It is cool and fresh up there, and silent but for the lapping of the

waves below; and that is soothing. She has fought a hard battle, and does not know exactly what to do with her victory. What if there be, after all, some ugly black spot upon her lover's fame, and she becomes the one to unveil it?

There is a good view of the town from where she sits, and as the reader will have to learn his way about it, this is not a bad place for a map.

Laremouth has seen better days. Long before the first hotel was built at Battleville—the fashionable watering-place on the other side of the bay—it had its manufactories of canvas and was the headquarters of the fishery on that part of the coast. Cheaper and better canvas can be got elsewhere now, and though many of the fisher-folk live where their grandfathers were born—fisher-folk being rank

Conservatives in this respect—they carry their spoil to Battleville, whence the railway whisks it up to all-devouring London.

Even the river which gives the place its name seems to have slunk away from it in its decadence, and dribbles a low-spirited stream through the mud of what was once a busy harbour. On the right bank is the town, which looks as though the great white bluff behind it had advanced one day and swept the houses into heaps—higgledy-piggledy—at its foot, and up its sides; wherever there is a break in the great wall of chalk.

It is a very full-flavoured town in warm weather under the cliff. Some quarter of a mile inland it finds more room, dodges the hill round a spur, and straggles off into the downs, where Madge can count,

ensconced in sheltered nooks, about a score of farm-houses and residences, more or less imposing, where the better class of her father's parishioners reside.

In the pleasantest nook of all, higher up the cliff than the rest, reposes the church and vicarage. You can see the spire from the sea, and I believe it forms a landmark for "making" Battleville from the west. Higher up still, not far from Madge's thinking-place, is the coastguard station, with its tall flag-staff and sulky-looking battery, where the Artillery Volunteers come to practise and the Coast Reserve is trained. At this point the seaward face of the cliff goes down a sheer three hundred feet. The other bank of the harbour is low and swampy, and boasts only a few hovels where fish used to be cured in the old days when Billingsgate

could not claim all the take for her own.

There are perhaps a dozen people with whom Madge can associate upon equal terms, and only one with whom she is intimate—a lady some years her senior, who had been out as a governess, from which brilliant career she retired some time before this story opens, to keep house for a bachelor brother lately a captain of mail steamers.

Jessie Westwood had been Bell's friend to begin with, and stood her stanch ally and comfort in her trouble about the man who "hadn't a sixpence:" and she was a favourite aversion of Mr. Henry Wybert —a very strong recommendation, just now, with Bell's successor. For this sixpence-less detrimental, upon whom every one had been "down"—this unprincipled do-

nothing, who was to eat up poor Bell's little fortune, and then illuse her—is making at the present writing about a shilling a minute of his working day; and there isn't a more spoiled woman in all London than Bell. As to that six thousand pounds; a good deal of that has gone back to the vicarage, and partly accounts for the ponies.

"Dear old Jess" (Miss Westwood was christened Jessie) "was right about Horace," Madge muses; "you might do worse than tell her about Henry's cruel letter and papa and poor Fraser; but not just yet awhile. The first thing to be done is to write to Uncle Joe, and find out what he thinks. If his answer be satisfactory you can play it off against Henry's vague insinuations. If it be otherwise, then indeed you will have need of a consoler."

Treacherous and mean! The words buzz in her mind like a fly on a window pane. Can it be some entanglement with another girl? She has a vague idea that young men may have entanglements which prudence says "break," and honour whispers "break not." Can Fraser be jilting some one for her? Some creature (the "other woman," I have observed, is always a creature) who has entrapped him, and whose part odious Henry Wybert is going to take?

Treacherous and *mean*. If he had gone through the whole vocabulary of detraction, he would not have found two adjectives more hateful to the heart of such a woman as Madge Marston. And he was the first man who had treated her as a grown-up young lady—the first who had led her to discover the power of her

sex—the first who had put the magic into her looking-glass which had told her she was pretty! The man of men. The man she loved! Ah, it was hard!

CHAPTER III.

AT BECKHAMPTON.

FRASER ELLICOTT, banished from the presence of his sweetheart by the stern laws of Mrs. Grundy until what he calls "all that humbug" is got over, runs up to London to hasten a solution of such part of it as relates to the "tin." The other question he considers quite safe in the hands of Henry Wybert, though he did toss his handsome head with something between a

laugh and a scoff when informed that his character would be taken in that direction. They had been boys, and to some extent playmates, together in the country town where Wybert was the son of a not very highly esteemed general practitioner, and Ellicott the heir of its popular squire. As men they had not seen much of each other until they met at Battleville, where that portentous visit to Laremouth Vicarage, once dreaded as a bore, had been arranged. Then did his deputy host rise mightily in his estimation. Here was a man who might call Miss Marston "Madge;" whom she called "Henry;" whose mere "all right" sanctioned picnics, boating-parties, and other delightful arrangements whereby he might gain the ear and smile of the lady of his love! There was even comfort in the discovery that the good genius of

the Vicarage was priggish and dictatorial to his young hostess, because for a day or so, before these qualities were developed, he was miserably jealous of him. He could very soon put an end to *that*, and in the meantime keep on good terms with the power that was, without playing the hypocrite. After all, Henry was a good sort of fellow in his way, though it wasn't quite a pleasant one. He had nothing to fear from Henry.

Respecting the "tin" he was equally at ease, though the account he gave Mr. Marston of his worldly possessions was somewhat vague. He was to come into his fortune when he was twenty-three, and there was the old Hall Estate at Beckhampton, and the mill, and some houses by the river, and a lot of shares and things that his guardian knew all about, and a

heap of money which had accumulated during his minority. Altogether he would have some three thousand a year—*somehow.* That was all he knew, but his guardian would write, and put everything down ship-shape. He had never known what it was to want a thing, and not get it—this spoiled child of Fortune! He wanted Madge, and she was happy to be wanted. That was enough.

So he went to his guardian, the Right Honourable Temple Fleurey, Under Secretary of State for a great department which had the reputation of doing business in the most orderly and slowest fashion of all the great departments; and here he received the first check.

The right honourable gentleman knew about as much of his ward's ways and means in detail, as did that ward himself;

but he was not going to commit himself on paper or off it, to a "somehow." No, Mr. Ellicott would have the goodness to address him a letter asking for the particulars he desired, which letter he—the right honourable gentleman — would forward to the solicitor who acted in the trust, and when he had received that person's reply, and verified its exactitude and had an hour's leisure, he would draft a desp—— he would write to the father of the young lady, and place him in possession of the result. Couldn't he drop a line at once and say it was about three thousand? oh dear no! The right honourable gentleman could not possibly deal with "abouts."

Now Fraser had promised not to write to his Madge, and she had promised to hold no communication with him till "all that humbug" was got over. He had

counted upon a probation of two days, and after a visit to the solicitor in question, found that he would have to pine for at least a fortnight. Well, his character was not made up of halls, and houses, and mills, and a lot of things which only a lawyer could put under £ *s. d.* *That* could and would be answered straight off, and dear little Madge's mind made happy.

And the conclusion was an honest one. He was within three months of the date fixed for his coming of age, strong, hearty, rich, bumptious (as some who did not like him said), considerably below the angels, his faithful chronicler is bound to admit. Still—as young men go, have gone, and will proceed—he had done nothing to be ashamed of. He might have done far worse, and yet be an excellent *parti* in the estimation of Mrs. Grundy, with his

three thousand a year as an absolution fund.

His only trouble was to kill time. The London season had begun. Lots of his friends were in town, and he need not have spent a dull hour; but the whirl of excitement jarred upon him. Unlike most men in love, he had the sense to know he could be nothing but a bore wherever he went—a bore if he held his tongue, and a greater bore still if he put what filled his thoughts into speech. So he determined to pass his probation where he could be silent without reproach, or talk as much as he pleased to sympathising ears.

He went off to Beckhampton. The old hall had to be turned out of windows for Madge, and it would be fine employment to plan improvements and speculate how Madge would like this, that, and the other,

about her future home. Besides, there would be the fun of a surprise, as he had not been there for nearly two years.

The surprise was a success, the wandering about a waste of old rooms without a pattern-book in his hand, or an upholsterer at his elbow, not so satisfactory. This was exercise only for his legs. After all, he concluded, it would be best to leave the furnishing to Madge—she had such good taste. So as soon as he had dined, he lit a big cigar, rang for the housekeeper (who had been his nurse), put on his slippers, and relieved his mind.

"I'm going to be married, Mrs. Aymes," he says, stretching out his legs and blowing a cloud of fragrant blue smoke up to the ceiling.

Good Mrs. Aymes, who, fearing orders for a bachelor party, sits fidgeting on the

chair he made her take, loses sight of the fine young gentleman before her, and sees only the child she nursed.

"Bless the boy!" she exclaims. "You don't say so?"

"I do; and the young lady says so too, which is more to the purpose."

"Lord! Lord! Well, it's only natural. May I make bold to ask who the lady is?"

"Certainly. Miss Marston, daughter of the vicar of Laremouth."

"What! Young Mr. Wybert's schoolmaster?"

"Schoolmaster isn't exactly the word. Henry Wybert was a pupil—he read, as they call it, with Mr. Marston."

"He goes there a good deal now, they say."

"Yes: he introduced me."

"Has the young lady any sisters, sir?"

"One."

"Ah! that's it, then," observes Nurse Aymes, half to herself. But he hears her.

"That's what?"

"Well, people did say he was sweet on one of them. Maybe there'll be two weddings, Master Fraser?"

"Oh dear no! she married years ago."

"The other one?"

"Why, you old goose! There were but two," he laughs; "and Wybert didn't hit it at all with the other one, as you call her. Tell me, what do they think of Henry Wybert down here?"

"I ain't fond of gossip, Master Fraser," she replies, after a pause; "but I don't

mind telling you. They think him a deal too uppish—takes after his mother; and I'm sure they've neither of them any call to give themselves airs."

"He won't give himself any more at Laremouth, so far as Mad—as Miss Marston is concerned," says the happy man decisively. "He treated her as though he were dame of some village school, and she a charity brat."

"Then there isn't any truth about his being sweet on her?"

"Lord bless you, no! He's only sweet on himself."

"Master Fraser, if you'll believe me, I *know* he has let folks down here tease him about being engaged to one of those young ladies, and he has not contradicted it."

"Then he's an infernal cad!" roars Fraser. "And if you hear any more such

impertinence, Mrs. Aymes, you have my authority to say that Miss Marston—now Mrs. de Grey—disliked him particularly; and that her sister is going to marry her first love—that's me."

After this outburst, which relieves his mind, he sits puffing away in silence, lugging at his moustache, and perhaps wishing it were Mr. Wybert's nose.

"Is it to be a secret, Master Fraser?" asks his old nurse.

"Oh no! you can tell anybody!"

"And when will you be married?"

"Just as soon as I am my own master."

"Well, well! t' think of that!"

The good woman rejoices, after the manner of her sex, over one of the other led captive; but dim visions that her place will not be as comfortable under a young

mistress as it has been under a young (and usually absent) master, flit over her mind, and she in turn relapses into silence.

"Any news?" he asks, breaking it. "Any one married or dead?"

"N—o—not that you care about; but some one's going away."

"Who's that?"

"Hazeltine, the miller."

"Old Hazeltine! What for?"

"He hasn't been getting along well lately, and his sons as went to Australia has; so they're going out to them."

"Rather late in life to emigrate."

"So I say. But it's all fixed. They go next month."

"I shall be sorry to lose old Hazeltine; he's a good fellow, and one of the best tenants we have."

"It will be a job to find as good a one

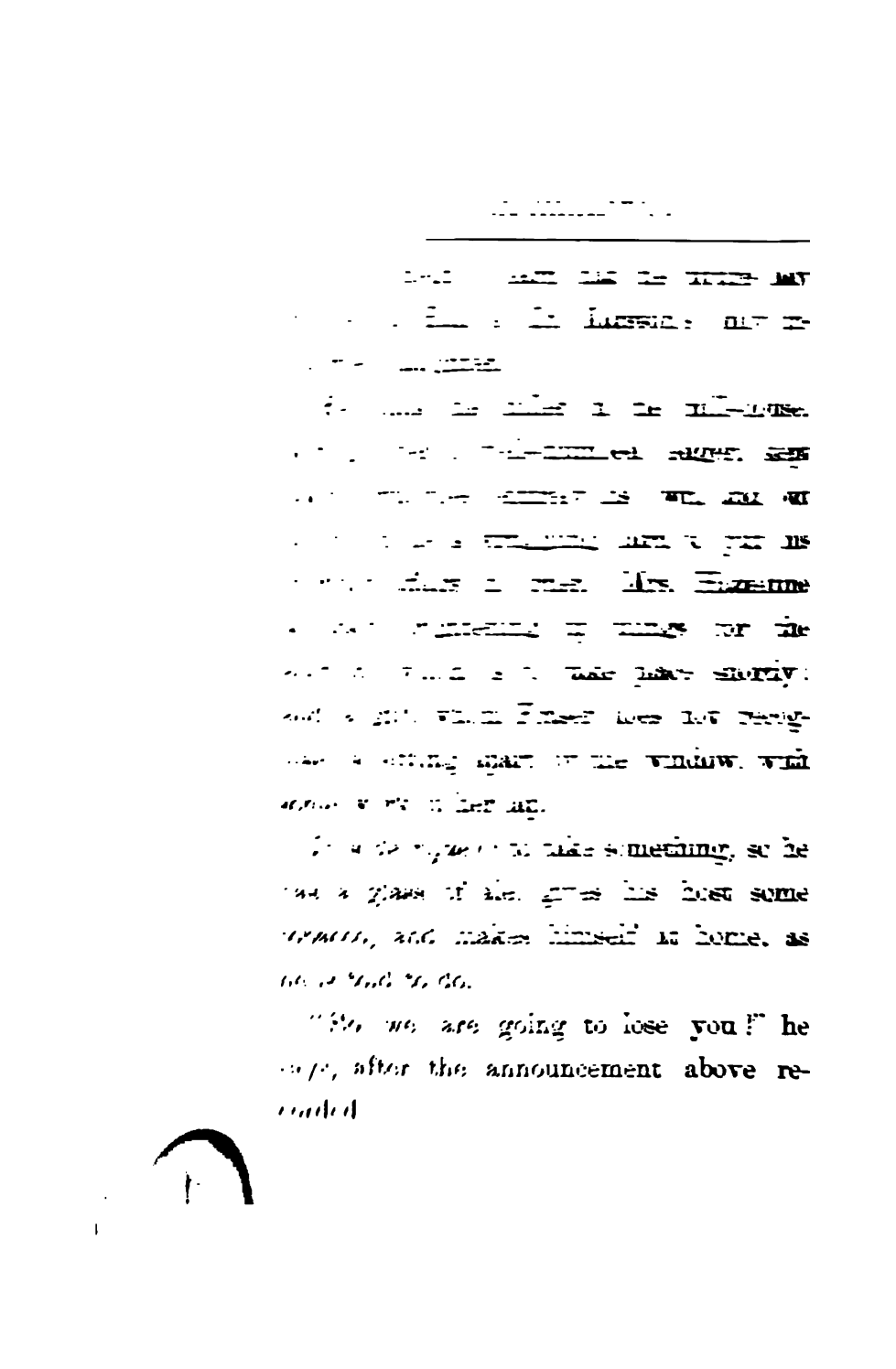
for the mill now. And Doctor Byng he's going to retire; sold the school, I hear."

So they go on discussing local affairs, which will not interest the reader, and coming back to *the* topic again, for another hour, when the housekeeper manages to conjure up a soda and b. from some recondite source, and Fraser goes to bed and dreams of Madge.

In the morning he is up betimes, hunts up some old tackle, and sallies out nominally to fish, really to have a talk with old Hazeltine. He commences with his great news; and, somewhat to his surprise, he is met with Mrs. Aymes's question:

"Isn't that where young Mr. Wybert was at school?"

Old Hazeltine, however, goes no further,



The miller puts away his ledger, lights a pipe, and sinking slowly into a Windsor chair, replies, with much deliberation between the puffs:

"Yes, sir, you be, sure enough! Things ain't as they was, or as they should be, I says. Them steam mills gets all the corn, and them bleachers up the vale takes all the water. There isn't bread and salt to be made now, by old-fashioned folk like us."

"I noticed that the river was low," said Fraser.

"Low? Low isn't the word! It's almost dry all summer; and what with that there craze for draining farmers gets bitten wi', it fills up that quick when the rains come, you've nubbut time to up sluices" (Mr. Hazeltine called them "slushes"), "afore it's on you like to carry mill and all away."

"And so you really think you will like Australia?"

"We've got to like it when we get there —ain't we, old woman?" says the miller cheerily.

His better half endorses this philosophic view, and adds:

"Oh, we're all right, Mr. Fraser, once we gets there."

"Are your sons married?" he asks.

"Both on 'em."

"I don't like to croak, Mrs. Hazeltine," observes the young squire, "but remember the old saying, 'My son's my son till he gets him a wife.'"

"My son's my son all the days of my life," the mother replies proudly. "They're good lads, sir, and God Almighty knows it and prospers 'em. I thank Him on my bended knees for it, and I thank Him too

that I was never worrited in a gal—of my own."

She glances towards the window as she thus rejoices; and Fraser, who follows her look, cries:

"Why, that's never little Kate?"

"Of course it is!" the miller shouts, slapping his thigh. "Why don't you come, Katie, and say how d'ye do to Mr. Fraser?"

"I was waiting for him to come and say how d'ye do to me," the girl replies demurely, raising her eyes from the work, but budging not an inch.

The voice, soft and musical, startles Mr. Fraser. The eyes of a dreamy but lustrous brown hold his own. For several moments he can do nothing but stare at her. He sees a slight, well-rounded form, clad in cheap cotton, only it is fashioned in a style

not usually to be found in mill-houses. No pretence—no attempt at finery, only taste. He sees a pair of small white hands busy with bright silks and glittering beads, over which a well-shaped head, with a wealth of gold bronze hair twisted around it, bends again in silence.

"Please don't think I was rude, Katie," he blurts out at last; "I really did not know you. Why, how you have grown and improved! What are the young fellows doing to let you go out to Australia?"

He speaks at her, to her aunt, and does not notice the ineffable expression of scorn which curls her handsome mouth.

"She's not going," Mrs. Hazeltine answers him dryly.

"Why not?"

A shrug of her ample shoulders is all the reply he gets from that quarter.

"Look here, Hazeltine," says Fraser, taking him by the shoulder and walking him into the porch; "if it's money that stops her, let me know. I think it a beastly shame to send such a pretty girl out of the country, but hang it! I should hate to think you are parted for want of a few pounds."

"She can go if she has a mind to," the miller replies, "and I don't rightly know what she's up to stopping behind. I thank ye kindly, sir, for your offer, but there's no need of it. If you'd just get out of her, now, what she's up to, that 'ud be a real service."

Fraser looks round, perhaps to see what chance was presented of getting this out of her, and sees Mrs. Hazeltine with her finger on her lip.

He returns to the "keeping-room," and

renews his apologies to Katie. The finger is gone from her aunt's lip, but he is plainly told by the expression on her face that he is not to do as her lord suggests. The talk turns on fishing, and soon the miller goes out to get some caddis worms which he thinks may tempt the trout, having previously sent Katie to look for a can to put them in. Then Mrs. Hazeltine, speaking low and quickly, says :

"Don't you try anything of the sort, sir, for it wouldn't be no sort of use. Let her alone, and p'r'aps she'll come. Worry her about reasons and that, and she'd get more pig-headed than ever."

"I dare say she dislikes to be a burden on you," says Fraser ; "now, if I——"

"That's not it. She knows she's welcome to her keep, and she's worth it. A handier girl about a house don't live. It ain't the

money, Mr. Fraser, it's this : she's a-thinking about a man who isn't a-thinking about her."

"Whew! Who is he?"

"That wouldn't be fair to tell. Because her mother married a gentleman she thinks she's going to do the same—but she isn't. There was two fools in that case, there's only one in this."

"But what on earth is she going to do when you leave?"

"Well, Mr. Pryor says she may stop here and take care of the house till it's rented, which won't be soon as things go. We shall leave her furniture for her room, poor foolish lass! and when she gets over her foolishness she'll go into service. I suppose you've no objection, sir?"

"To her going into service?"

"No, to her staying on here."

"Oh, I leave all those things to Pryor. She may stop till Doomsday for me. But about going into service. Why shouldn't she come to us? My wife" (the rascal drew himself up and spoke *ore rotundo*) "my wife will want a maid, and she shall be well treated and looked after, Mrs. Hazeltine. I don't want to press your confidence, or to say anything unkind of Katie, but when such a pretty girl as she is falls in love with a gentleman, why——"

"I understand, sir, and I thank you kindly," says Mrs. Hazeltine. "If she will stop behind I shall leave her with a lighter heart after your kind offer, for I love the gal though she is no blood of mine."

"So her mother married above her. The usual thing I suppose; rows with the family, and then ill-usage of their cause,"

Fraser observes, with the air of a grandfather. He has been feeling old and responsible since his engagement.

"No, there wasn't no *rows* or ill-usage," Mrs. Hazeltine replies. "Leastwise he didn't beat her or that. The fam'ly dropped him, and he just slunk down lower and lower; hadn't the spirit to work for her, and took to drink. If it hadn't a bin for my good man they'd a starved."

"And where are they now?"

"Lord bless you, sir! why, in their graves years ago. Katie's bin living with us ever since she was twelve, and I can say I've done my duty by her. I often wish we'd a took her sister too."

"Oh, she has a sister!"

"The less said about *her* is soonest mended, Mr. Fraser."

"Went to the bad, eh?"

"No, sir, the bad was brought to her. When we took Katie she went to her other aunt at Oxford. Did you know Blake's stables when you was at Oxford?"

"Well."

"Would you have let a young girl run wild about such a place?"

"Well, I don't think I would if I had any interest in her."

"Mary Blake married my old man's brother—a richer man nor he by a long way, and we thought it a fine thing for Sarah when they took her, as they hadn't chick or child of their own. They just let her run wild, poor girl! But hush! here comes Katie."

CHAPTER IV.

UNCLE JOE.

A PERSONAGE who would not be at all pleased to find himself left out until the fourth chapter of a story in which he figured, now claims our attention; the person who knew everybody, or could, if he liked—the Uncle Joe of Madge Marston, the Joe Balderson of a large circle of intimates, and the Sir Joseph Balderson, C.B., Brown's Club, Pall Mall, and "The Firs," Surrey, of the "Court

Guide." He is Uncle Joe at Laremouth, because his sister married the Vicar. He is a baronet because he is his father's son; and he is a C.B. because the Foreign Office, in whose service he passed the best years of his life, could not get rid of him in peace until those honourable letters were tacked to his name.

The messes that man got into! the "questions" he raised when left *chargé d'affaires*, for the mere pleasure of writing despatches; the snubs he got from "my lord," need not be recorded here. As a diplomatist sent to keep things quiet abroad, he was a dismal failure; as an arbitrator of delicate affairs in the world bounded by St. James's Park and Piccadilly, Regent Street and Park Lane, he was a brilliant success. In the service, his failing was to "have it out" *coûte que coûte;*

out of it, his maxim was "cover it up and never mind the expense." Perhaps he had learned wisdom. Perhaps he drew a distinction between services that were paid for and those that were not, to the advantage of the latter. It matters little. It was he who, when Shiney Tollburgh's miserable young wife ran away, as all the world said, with Colonel —— (I won't mention names) to Scotland, followed her to Brindisi, and brought her back before the P. and O. steamer arrived.

It was he who when a certain passenger by that good ship wanted to eat him up alive for his interference, told him "not to be a fool, and wait twelve months," and it was he who shortly after that date officiated as best man at St. George's, Hanover Square, to a certain captain of Artillery who espoused Georgina, widow

of the late Wilbraham Tollburgh deceased (of D.T.). The whole trouble was covered up beautifully, and one of the most popular women in London had to thank Joe Balderson that she did not meet her present husband at Brindisi. Who but he got Mademoiselle X. to sing with "the Z." in *Don Giovanni?* Where would the present Lord —— be if Joe had not made him go into a lunatic asylum for six months after that affair in the card-room of the Ramillies Club? All the world (within the bounds above described) knows another dozen instances of Uncle Joe's astuteness, and I only mention these for the information of a few millions of outsiders.

Uncle Joe lodged during the season in Arlington Street, and lived at his clubs. When the season was over he visited his

friends. Once upon a time he rented a cottage called "The Firs," somewhere on the outskirts of Richmond, and as it looked well in the "Court Guide" and "Blue Book" he kept the name on as a local habitation. "THE FIRS, Surrey!" It might have been another Chatsworth for aught the vulgar could tell. He was Madge's godfather, but his visits to the Vicarage after his sister's death were angelic. Mere money scrapes were out of his sphere, and a man who incessantly wanted fifty pounds for a fortnight was a leper in his sight. Besides, Laremouth was dull and damp; and the Vicar's sherry!—well, the poor man could not send it back, not having paid for many previous batches.

Thus Uncle Joe had little personality for Madge, and, being an unit of the few

millions before mentioned, she knew not the grounds of his metropolitan fame. Henry Wybert had spoken of him as a highly popular and knowing person—that was all. Henry, who since his success with her father, burned to put his finger into other pies, revered the man who was on the free list at the Devil's largest pastry-cook's, and was never tired of narrating how he had assisted his friend Sir Joseph in this delicate affair, or how that scandal had been hushed up by his friend Sir Joseph, exactly as he (Mr. Wybert) had suggested.

The hall porter at "Brown's" gives Sir Joseph his letters on a fine May morning, not particularly early, and as the direction of one of them suggests reminiscences of fifty pounds for a fortnight, he places it

at the bottom of the pack, like a "burned" card, and frowns.

He reads his correspondence, tearing up some with "pishes!" and "dear, dears!" and answers others whilst his breakfast is getting ready; keeping the last for perusal after that meal.

Some day I shall write a moral essay upon Breakfasts, and read it at a Social Science Congress, if I cannot get it published in a magazine. When a man has passed five-and-thirty, a good deal may be gleaned of his character and prospects by the manner in which he breakfasts. What he eats and drinks; how he eats and drinks it; what he does between whiles; what—if he be a club man—he says to the steward when he pays his bill, or in what manner, if the proprietor of a wife and children, he leaves the table—are

all signs and indications upon which I shall enlarge. Why, when a man breakfasts in the bosom of his family the condition of the cruet-stand alone affords matter for twenty pages at least of lucubration. But this is for the future. For the present I have only to say that Uncle Joe eat a good breakfast with a good appetite, and had a good word to say to all concerned, from the page boy who told him it was ready, to the stately steward who took the money, when he had flicked the crumbs from his knee.

Then, and not till thus fortified, did he open the last of his letters, and finding that it commenced "My dear Balderson," emitted a grunt of relief. For previous correspondence of the fifty-pounds-for-a fortnight order had begun in a much more affectionate manner—"Dear Joseph," or

"Dear Brother" when the need was unusually pressing. "My dear Balderson" seemed to breathe independence, and Uncle Joe settled himself in his seat and re-applied his *pince nez* to read the rest with a tranquillised mind. He read :

"Laremouth Vicarage,
"May 3rd, 1875.

"MY DEAR BALDERSON,

"You will perhaps be surprised to hear that my dear Madge has received a proposal of marriage from a gentleman who appears to be in all respects worthy of her. Now, my dear fellow, shut out as I am from society, it is impossible for me to make the usual inquiries as to his character and habits, and as your circle of acquaintance is so wide, and you are the girl's godfather, I make no scruple in

asking you to find out for us as much as you can about him. His name is Fraser Ellicott, of the old Hall, Beckhampton, and he has no near relatives. His father died when he was quite young, and I am afraid the poor boy has run wild. We must therefore not be too hard upon him. Silly little Madge is very fond of him, she says, and it would break her heart if anything were to prevent the match; still we want the plain unvarnished truth.

"He was introduced to us by my great friend Mr. Wybert, who knew him as a child, but has lost sight of him for so long that he does not feel justified in standing his sponsor; but from what fell from him before we had any idea that Mr. Ellicott was thinking about my daughter, it is evident that the latter is a man of considerable property and highly respected

where his estates are. Madge says I am not to apologise for thus troubling you, because you have broken your promise to teach her the catechism and read her sermons, and that you cannot expect to be godfather to the future *châtelaine* of the old Hall for nothing.

"Yours most sincerely,

"FRANK MARSTON."

"Marston never wrote that," observes Uncle Joe, tapping the paper with lowered *pince nez*. "The chit dictated it for him. 'My dear fellow' is rather masculine, though perhaps she's been reading novels. So I am to find out as much as I can about Mr. Fraser Ellicott—but not too much. Whitewash him if necessary. Oh! these women!"

Uncle Joe reads his newspaper with

much deliberation, and about one o'clock pays a visit to the Virginia, a club much frequented by young men, and which began—as some similar institutions end—. in smoke! One o'clock is not too late for breakfast at the Virginia, and Uncle Joe knows apparently where to find the person he seeks. He finds a man of about his own age, but dressed as though he had just been sent down from a fast college; breakfasting delicately on devilled mackerel and seltzer and b. He listens patiently to a story, another version of which will appear in the police reports of the next day, and then makes inquiry, in a casual by-the-bye manner, about Fraser Ellicott.

Next he drops into a certain *office* not a thousand miles from the Burlington Arcade, and where a good deal of business will be transacted on the Saturday (and I

am shocked to add the next day) after the Derby is run, and here he asks in vain for Fraser Ellicott.

In the Park when the drive has got thin, he holds up his forefinger as an elegant pony-carriage is about to pass, and the fair charioteer pulls up with the quickness and ability of a hansom cabman. An instant before she was looking as demure as Astarte; now she bursts out into a giggle and says:

"Well, this is a 'onour! Wot d'ye want?"

"Frank as usual," smiles Uncle Joe, and then he tells her what he wants; but she cannot help him.

"Where are you going to-night?" he asks.

"To see the new piece at the Regency, and then to Polly's ball."

"Ah! Then ask about him for me, will you, like a good girl?"

"Tell me something," she says in a lowered voice, and placing a large but perfectly gloved hand on his arm, "What about poor old Guss?"

"I will, in reply to your note to-morrow about Fraser Ellicott;" and with a nod and a smile and the same sweep of his hat with which he would salute a Duchess, Uncle Joe is gone.

Poor old Guss! He has lately exchanged into a West India Regiment from the Rifles, and the lady who drives on somewhat slower than she came, knows the reason why: Uncle Joe keeps his word, and in return for no news about Fraser Ellicott, even from so knowing an assemblage as was sure to grace "Polly's" ball, returns much information respecting

"poor Guss," and there are tears—bitter tears, if not honest ones—shed that afternoon in Brompton.

So Uncle Joe has fished in the *rapids* of the rivers of Babylon and had no rise. He has drawn three different sorts of covers—blank; and he likes it. From the fog—I really beg pardon—from the middle aged gentleman of his more particular club, he hears that old Ellicott—Fraser's father—was a capital fellow, and from a youth of thirty-seven, who by some mistake had managed to get in, he learns that the son had been seen at Mrs. Creamley's five o'clock teas at Rome. Now you may dine five times a week with any Duke you like to mention, without gaining the social *cachet* which a cup of Mrs. Creamley's Bohea can bestow. So this is the letter which Madge got into a fever of expecta-

tion about, intercepted on its way to the Vicarage, and tore open, though it was not addressed to her:

"Brown's Club,
"May 5th.

"DEAR MARSTON,

"I congratulate you and Madge. I cannot hear anything that is not to the youngster's credit, but there may be a crop of wild oats growing somewhere under the rose. Better send him to me and I will trot him out,

"Yours sincerely,
"J. BALDERSON.

"Rev. Frank Marston."

The second dearest man in the universe that day was Uncle Joe. Now she (the intercepter) could lay her throbbing little heart bare to Jessie; but first she had to

tell papa and have a little crow over Henry Wybert.

In her anxiety to secure a letter with a London postmark she had allowed the postman to go on to the Vicarage with one marked Beckhampton, the writing upon which would have brought her heart into her mouth had she caught a glimpse of it. By the time she had thoroughly mastered Uncle Joe's report and entered her father's study, he had read that other letter. She found him rubbing his soft white hands together slowly, and when she came in, he took her face between them and kissed it on one side and then on the other and then on the lips, as though he would say, "There! that's all right, and *that*, and *that*."

"Don't be angry with me," says Madge, "for opening Uncle Joe's letter. It was

all about me, you know, and I couldn't resist."

A shadow passes over her father's face at mention of Uncle Joe, and because Madge looks grave. She is so because she expects to be scolded — as indeed she deserves — for her impatience; but he dreads ill news.

"Ah, yes; quite so. Just as one might expect," he observes as he reads the violated epistles; "most satisfactory, my love. Did I tell you that I have had quite a little surprise this morning? I have heard from Fraser!" This is the first time he had spoken of him by his— I must say "given"—name, and it sounds so sweet in her ears. "Yes, I was reading his letter when you came in. His guardian (of whom I must really get him to write in a more respectful tone) cannot have the

particulars of his property prepared for some days; but that does not matter. We know the amount—more or less—and he makes very liberal and generous proposals about the marriage settlements."

"Settlements!" Madge repeats with arched eyebrows and a glint of mischief under them. "I thought there was no formal engagement yet?"

"It was a matter of form to *say* so, my dear."

"Then Henry's cruel insinuations——"

"Are to be treated as insinuations deserve," says the Vicar in a lofty tone.

It is now his turn to be kissed—one! two!! three!!! Of course she wants to read what her lover has proposed that is liberal and generous. Her parent, however, objects that this is a matter of

business not intended for her eye, but which may be explained to her.

"You see, my love," he begins, "he has found out, or perhaps only suspects, that you have a little fortune of your own, and he says he will leave you to deal with it exactly as you please. Now isn't that delicate, and — and liberal?"

"You didn't suppose he wants to marry me for my money?"

"Oh dear no! But six thousand pounds is a nice little sum, and not to be picked up every day. A sensible man does not marry for a pretty face, but he does not object to beauty in the girl he loves for better reasons. The same thing with a fortune. Many a richer man than Fraser would not have acted so well."

"What is six thousand pounds worth a year, papa?"

"Properly invested, it would yield at least two hundred and fifty pounds."

"So much! Then that will be for my — what do they call it? — oh, *pin money.*"

"Tush!—pin money! No, child. Of course he will have to provide you with that. Didn't I tell you that the money—the six thousand pounds—is to be yours, your own; to deal with as you like, just as though you had come of age, and were not going to be married. Now do you see?"

"Yes," she replies, catching one glimpse of an excited face full of weakness, and then lowering her eyes; "I can give it to you."

"I would not take it! No, indeed—only

as a loan. If you like to do so, Madge, you can lend me the interest of it for a year or two, until I—as long as your poor dear mother was alive, my love, her fortune helped to keep house. When she died it was shared by you and your sister, and——"

He goes on to explain what the reader knows already, but so softening it down, that Madge is left under the impression that his difficulties are her fault and Bell's; first for being born, and next for wanting to marry. She feels quite guilty as he recounts the sacrifices he has made for her education, and the atrocious conduct of the High Court of Chancery.

As she listens an undercurrent of perplexity as to how Fraser has found this out, makes itself felt, and soon runs so strong as to carry away her attention from

the speaker, whose mien becomes more and more pitiable, not getting the answer he expects, or being told to cease the explanations he repeats. At last she recovers herself with a start, and he is made quite happy.

"May I write to him now?" she asks shyly.

"You may; but perhaps it would be proper to wait till he writes first."

"Papa! Of course I wouldn't begin; only how is he to know it's all right?"

"I will telegraph if you like, my darling."

"What! before you hear from Uncle Joe how the trotting out 'goes.'"

There is mischief again in Madge's eye.

"Oh, I'm satisfied," says her father.

'[illegible] those awful [illegible]'

'[illegible] me [illegible]' replies the [illegible] with musical de-[illegible]

CHAPTER V.

WHAT CAME OF FISHING.

MILLER HAZELTINE'S caddis worms were not sacrificed in vain. Low as was the river, half a dozen three-quarter flounders fell victims to Fraser's skill and the suggestions of his guide, and as the sixth speckled beauty flopped upon the grass, a happy thought struck the now tired angler. He would go and pay Mrs. Wybert a "duty" visit; and as she was not a lady to be

approached without an excuse, he would take her those trout as a goodwill offering.

The widow was now living in the same cottage to which she had been led as a bride eight and twenty years ago, when her late husband was assistant to his predecessor at Beckhampton; and now his successor was prescribing for another generation of invalids in the square stone house in the High Street, with the green door and brass knocker, with five steps and an iron railing to get up to it on one side, and five steps and an iron railing to go down by at the other, if you liked variety — the house in which she once reigned supreme; and, I may add, *out* of which Doctor Wybert's most pleasant hours were spent. I fancy that the doctor would have been a better Christian if his wife had been

less religious. Charity, in one proverbial bearing of the term, would not have made her a pocket-handkerchief, but a visiting card would not cover the real or imagined sins she did not denounce. He would also have been a far more prosperous man if she had not taken so much trouble to insure his prosperity. As it was, he died a poor man with a reputation of prescribing too much alcoholic stimulant for his own complaints, and she—out of perversity as some had it—continued to reside amongst the people who disliked her and whom she despised.

Fraser found her seated in the porch knitting something. She did not rise to greet him, or motion him to a seat, though the one opposite her was vacant. Nor did she ask him in, or thank him for his fish, which he hung up on the creeping rose, not

knowing what else to do with them. To tell the truth, this strapping young fellow was afraid of Mrs. Wybert, but as her son had done him such a good turn at Laremouth, he was determined to be civil to her.

"I have come to tell you my news, Mrs. Wybert," he says, as jauntily as he can; "I owe my good fortune in a measure to Henry. You have a right to hear of it amongst the first."

"If you wish your *conquest*" (she lays a stress upon the word) "to be made public, Mr. Ellicott, you have come to the wrong person. Very few visit me here, and I go absolutely nowhere," she replies dryly.

"You know, then?" he asks.

"That you are going to be married? yes."

"Well, congratulate me."

"I congratulate Miss Marston. It is very fortunate for young ladies in her position, that there are young men in yours."

"I put it quite the other way," he answers her loyally. "Who am I? My grandfather was a trader, and bought the old Hall out of contract rum. (I hope it was better than some they gave me at the Coastguard Station one night.) Miss Marston is my superior in every way—birth, education, everything."

"There is plenty of birth and education going begging. I wish you had found it—such as it is—without dragging in my son. You'll be blaming him some day for his foolish interference."

"Foolish?" expostulated Fraser.

"Yes, foolish. What good does it do him, wasting his time, and I dare say his

money, with fine folks, who only make use of him? Do you think they thank him for what he has done for them?"

"I will try hard that they shall."

"Nonsense! I'm not speaking of your introduction by him to the girl. They are thankful enough for *that*, I'll be bound. Don't you know that he neglected his own business, and spent weeks and months arranging her bankrupt father's affairs? My late husband, who never knew the value of money, paid a hundred and fifty guineas a year for him to be taught nothing there; and he, like an idiot, goes and wastes time worth twice as much for worse than nothing."

"If you knew how welcome and respected Henry is at the Vicarage, I do not think you would say that."

"I should hope he was *welcome*, con-

sidering they would have been turned out of it long ago if it hadn't been for him. I won't say anything about *respect.* People respect those who respect themselves. They just make use of him—that's all."

"I must really ask you to be a little more explicit, Mrs. Wybert," says Fraser, upon whom this explanation of her son's intimacy with the Marstons comes like a blow. "I never heard of any difficulties."

"Of course not! Did you ask? Did you try to hear? Did you ever let my son (whom you hold responsible for this grand introduction) know of your intentions? Not you! You go down there behind his back—the great Mr. Ellicott, of the old Hall—with your yacht and your mail phaeton, with your eyes shut and your head in the air, and you carry all

before you! Then you come to me, bragging of your conquest. Much you've conquered!"

"Really, madam, if I had thought that the news would have been so disagreeable to you, I should certainly have kept it to myself; only it seems you are posted up pretty well. May I ask if your son shares your ideas?"

"I am in the habit of forming my own ideas, sir, and do not answer for those of other people. My son has informed me of your proposal to Miss Marston."

"What did he say?"

"His letter was to his mother."

"You can tell me this much, surely—was he glad?"

"If he wishes you to know his feelings, he will himself impart them."

"Yes; but to tell truth, I forgot to

write to him. I've had such a lot to do and think about," pleads Fraser, rather guiltily.

"You have been fishing."

"Yes; but one can think a deal, fishing. If it hadn't been for old Hazeltine, I shouldn't have caught much, though."

"So you have been to the mill! A pretty scandal there. That good-for-nothing girl to be left behind. I always said she would come to mischief."

"She has not come to mischief, and she is not going to be left behind, as you insinuate, Mrs. Wybert; she remains of her own free will, and is as good a girl as any in the town. After what you said about not going out, I did not expect to hear the first bit of slander at your door."

"I dare say you think that is very clever and biting. I am accustomed to

hear such retorts, as are all those who will not be hoodwinked and speak their minds. The plain deduction from plain facts is always *slander*. Are old Hazeltine and his wife going to Australia ?"

"Yes."

"And do they leave Kate Vane behind ?"

"She remains behind."

"Has she ever done a stroke of honest work ?"

"Scores a day. Her aunt gives her so good a character that I shall recommend her to my wife as her maid."

"Oh ! in—deed !"

Fraser has stepped aside to re-adjust the trout, which are swinging to their fall, and does not see the expression which fills the hard, angry face.

"I am sorry that our first conversation,

after so long, should not have been more pleasant," he says, coming back, and leaning, as before, against the porch. "It hasn't been my fault."

"You must take me as you find me," she replies, with a shrug. "Lonely women are not good company, as a rule."

"Well, you mustn't be lonely," he says cheerfully. "When we come to live here, we hope to see a good deal of you and Henry. I am conceited enough to think that Mad—that Miss Marston will be prepossessed in your favour."

"Still harping on that introduction?"

"It was the best thing that ever happened for me!"

"And for him too—if he only knew it," she snaps.

"It made him a friend."

"And saved him—no matter. It is all for the best."

"That is the nearest approach to a kindness you have spoken to-day," he laughs. "Pray go on."

"I wish you well."

"Thank you. But the trout? They will be kippered if we leave them in this sun. May I take them to the kitchen?"

"If you please."

"They are quite fresh."

"So I see." And she resumed her knitting.

* * * *

"Gracious! what a woman!" he ejaculates, as he passes out of the side gate, after having told "the girl" how to dress his present. "No wonder poor Henry tries his luck in town, or why old Wybert took to the bottle."

He walks home leisurely, and thinks over what he has heard about Madge's father. The key-note thus struck, forgotten chords begin to revive and sound clearly. Where had he heard that Miss Marston had a little money of her own? Had Wybert mentioned it when he first began to brag at Belleville about his aristocratic friends over the Bay? Or had it come up in conversation with Sister Bell and the sixpence-less man? No, that was afterwards.

Mr. Marston had himself broached the subject after dinner one day, as an instance of the iniquities perpetrated by Her Majesty's High Court of Chancery. His dear daughter's little fortune was kept from her, and she was denied the advantages other girls of her age had. That was it. And so Mr. Marston had the—

yes, I regret to say that Mr. Ellicott, musing over the position of his future father-in-law, concluded that he had "the devil by the tail." Whatever that may mean I protest I do not know; but as soon as he got home, he wrote that letter apologising for his guardian's delay, and making the proposal Mr. Marston thought so liberal.

There was some of the wisdom of the serpent in this, too. Something whispered it would be quite as well to cut in and trump Mr. Henry Wybert's best card; not because he feared Mr. Wybert in any way, but because he liked to be number one at the Vicarage.

Now see what great things from little things arise! If Miller Hazeltine had not thought of those caddis worms, Fraser would not have caught any trout. If he

had not caught any trout, he would not have thought of calling on old Mrs. Wybert. If he had not called on old Mrs. Wybert, he would not have written that letter, the upshot of which was that the Vicar of Laremouth bade her son "go hang!"

And if he had not gone to the Mill? If he had not gone to the Mill, he would have avoided the greatest misfortune of his life. So it is in the great battle. We duck at the shot that wounds poor Tom in the rear rank, to put our head just in the way of the shell that blows it off our shoulders. Happy are those who hear nor shot nor shell, and go their ways in ignorance of the fate that is rushing by.

Fraser Ellicott went down to his patrimony with a boy's recollection of it. He

found it shrunken, and all things will shrink. Go to your old school, your old college, the church you preached your first sermon in, the court where first you said "Gentlemen of the jury," the ward in which you first saw "a case"—after a lapse of years, and note how small they have all got! Not much of a lapse had divided Fraser from the old Hall, but he had travelled, and travel makes one's eyes concave. It never was a grand place; nothing baronial about it but the name. It was just a big, ugly red-brick house, such as they built in the days of good Queen Anne, solid and spacious, but dull. I have said that he soon gave up the idea of furnishing in Madge's absence. Madge had such good taste she should do that for herself. There was nothing to do but to fish, and fishing without old Hazeltine at

his elbows meant an empty basket. Now he could not find old Hazeltine without going to the Mill, and he could not go to the Mill without seeing Katie—Katie Vane with the soft brown eyes and gold-brown hair who loathed the very ground he trod on.

Why? Loathe is a strong word. What motive had she to loathe him? Motive, my friends, is a very difficult thing to gauge, and yet the dullest of us are ready to lay down the law why this was done and to declare that there was no motive for that. Motive is the trigger which sends off the charge, and the result all depends upon how this is loaded. Shake your finger in one man's face, and your heart's blood is the least oblation for the offence. You may thrash another within an inch of his life, and he is quite satisfied with having

you fined five shillings! Thrust a torch into a pile of wet wood and all that follows is a splutter. Touch a summer-dried thatch with a lucifer match and away goes half a village into flames. Take the friendships you have made and ask yourself what motive you had for liking Dick or Jack? Why does Tom work so pertinaciously to put a spoke in your wheel of fortune? You are loaded with goodwill on the one hand, and bad on the other. The faintest tap upon the detonator fires you, and some wiseacre says there was no motive.

Katie Vane was loaded full of trouble and vexation. She was proud and sensitive. Two years ago, whilst staying on a visit with that sister at Oxford of whom we have heard, she was (as she thought) cut by Fraser Ellicott. Christchurch

Meadows were blooming with fair women. Town was sparsely represented; but the Vanes, Sarah and Katie, were there, and did not feel themselves out of place. Had not their father been a fellow of "the house?"

Sarah Vane was apt to boast of the number of her undergraduate admirers, and Katie felt rather lonely. She brightened up as Fraser came along, and was glad to be able to say, "Oh! here is Mr. Ellicott."

It was hard for her when he passed without a bow. Did she loathe him for that? Does one grain of gunpowder send the bullet on its way? Would any number of grains, exploded separately, do it? He cut her (she thought it a cut, but he saw her not) at Oxford, he did not recognise her at Beckhampton, and he twitted her at not

being married to some bumpkin! There was the sting! when her heart was sore for her gentleman lover.

Sunday came, and he went to church conscious of being the observed of all observers. The attorney's daughters (five of them) giggled as he went in, and all the children laid wait and glared at him, with their fingers in their mouths, as he went out.

When the service was over, it struck him that people were in an unusual hurry to get out of church. There were not many hand-shakings in the porch, and no congratulations. He took an early dinner with his agent Mr. Pryor, the attorney, and the five young ladies who giggled, but the name of Miss Marston was not mentioned during the repast.

On summer Sunday afternoons it was

the wont of Beckhampton's golden youth to assemble on the bridge, each with his own peculiar stick, his own peculiar pipe, and his own peculiar dog or dogs. There was not much conversation at these gatherings. Pipes were examined, and their colouring compared amidst a good deal of cuff rubbing. The dogs had little unpleasantnesses amongst themselves, which invoked the use of their owner's peculiar sticks. When a quorum had arrived, the company would saunter away (to the great delight of its dogs) to the town fields along the banks of the Beck, where mild athletics, such as standing jumps and vaulting over gates, were indulged in to pass the time.

Fraser Ellicott, finding hot roast beef at two p.m. somewhat soporific, joined this party, and soon found that he was its wet

blanket. A gap of two years, at his age, is not easily bridged over. He was "Mr. Ellicott" and "Sir," whilst all the rest were "Jack" and "Ted" and so on. He tried hard to hark back to the old days when he was "Frase" in such company. He chaffed young Maxwell, who had been his dearest friend as a boy, about the second Miss Pryor (the one who walks with her chin), but it fell flat. Now he was proud of being engaged, and wanted to talk and be talked to about the lady of his love. He had been looking forward to Sunday, expecting that it would bring a crop of congratulations.

He had accepted his agent's hospitality on purpose to be catechised by the five Miss Pryors; and he had gone to the bridge on purpose to be chaffed by the companions of his youth.

"What the deuce is the matter with all the people?" he asked himself.

The people had been led to understand that Mr. Henry Wybert was the accepted suitor of Miss Marston, when, in an evil hour, he introduced Mr. Fraser Ellicott to the family; and that then the young lady incontinently threw over her poor lover to become mistress of the old Hall. Love of fair play—not of young Mr. Wybert—put Beckhampton's back up. Hence the cold reception of the (supposed) traitor, and the silence respecting "that false and mercenary girl."

Unconscious Fraser only thinks that his native town has become confoundedly dull and stupid, and concocts schemes to wake it up a bit, when he and Madge shall have come to the Hall. For the present he finds it a bad place to kill time in, and rejoices

exceedingly when he receives Mr. Marsto 's letter, calling him his "dear son" and re e-questing him to call in that capacity upo n Sir Joseph Balderson and Mrs. De Gray i n London.

CHAPTER VI.

EVERY ONE THINKS SO.

THE words "Henry may go hang" make sweet music in Madge's ears. The Revolution is an ac-ıplished fact; King Henry is dethroned, l King Fraser proclaimed in his stead! ɜ does not stop just now to inquire why father has gone over to the enemy; is too glad that it is so. The humilia-ʒ thought that the power which be-yed King Henry is not to be trusted,

and may play the traitor again to King Fraser, has yet to be born; and the feelings of uncertainty and danger which follow in its train to appear.

Flushed with her triumph, she skips out to talk it all over with Jess—dear old neglected Jess! To tell her how dear Fraser has passed through the ordeal, and to sing the praises of that best and wisest of mankind—Uncle Joe. She leaves the Vicar flushed also with his revolt, and busy finding excuses for it in the lumber-rooms of his mind. Anything will do. Craft, Greed, Fear, Ingratitude and eight other devils sit in his breast as a grand jury, and find a true bill against Henry Wybert, with a terrible array of counts therein.

Captain Westwood (he retains his courtesy-rank, and desires to do so) resides, as

we know, not far from the Vicarage, to which his dwelling is next in importance—a comfortable white stone house, surrounded by a large garden in which he delights to raise green peas which cost him seven shillings a pint, and cucumbers which might be pine-apples for the capital sunk in their pits. Madge greets him with a pleasant "Morning, Captain; Jess in?" as he looks up from his weeding with his hand to his back (he is not as good at stooping as he was twenty years ago) and trots on, knowing quite well where to find Jess at that time of day.

"You are a dear old ill-used thing," cries Madge, lifting her off the floor and giving her a twist round; "but don't look so reproachful. I've come back, and I'm good, and oh Jess! so happy. Guess

what has kept me away for the last ever so long?"

"You haven't been ill," replies Jess reproachfully; "I saw you several times on the cliff."

"I always go to the cliff when I'm bothered."

"And what has bothered my child?" asks the kind little lady, patting her fair, flushed face.

"Oh! it's all over now; but guess, guess, will you give your tongue to the dogs?"

"Certainly. The best part of the riddle is the answer."

"I'm—going—to—be—married," Madge replies, holding her at arms' length, prepared for a demonstration of surprise—but it doesn't come.

"So that's settled at last!" Jessie

says with less emotion than the choice of a new bonnet would evoke.

"You may well say *at last.* It seems about six months since last Thursday," Madge observes, seating herself; "but you're not a bit surprised?"

"Not a bit."

"But you're glad?"

"Oh yes. He doesn't like me, but I think him a very good and sensible young man, and I'm sure he'll make a capital husband."

"That's my dear old Jess; only you're mistaken about his not liking you. He likes you very much," says Madge.

"He takes an odd way of showing his regard, then. Are you aware that he disapproved our intimacy after your sister's marriage, and advised your father not to encourage my visits to the Vicarage?"

"That was Henry."

"Yes."

"Henry Wybert."

"Well, I'm speaking of him."

"But I'm not. Where have your dear old brains gone wool-gathering? I told you I was going to be married."

"To Henry?"

"To Henry! who ever thought of such a thing?"

Miss Westwood is really astonished now and shows it.

"Good gracious, child!" she exclaims. "We all thought so."

"Then all I can say is that you are a set of geese," Madge rejoins with considerable vexation. "Why, I'd as soon think of marrying old Probert" (this person is the parish clerk and sexton; solemn, snuffy, and sixty) "as

Henry Wybert. But you're joking of course."

"Indeed, indeed I'm not," says Jess. "Ask any one if it hasn't been considered a settled thing for the last year and more, that you and Henry——"

"Jess, you frighten me! What on earth have I done, or has he done, to warrant such—such nonsense?"

"He was here so often and took such interest, and, and——"

"Snubbed me so! Is that the way you suppose men make love?" Madge sneers.

"You have many faults—of impulse, dear Madge; and you often use words which don't sound well in a young girl's mouth. Snubbed, for example, isn't a pretty word. He corrected you."

"Before everybody."

"My darling! that was just it! Where a man of his age corrects a girl of yours, and she does not resent it—what is one to suppose but that he is trying to form her character, and that she does not object to have it formed to please him?"

"I wish to Heaven I had slapped his face!" Madge bursts out.

"Oh, Madge!"

"I do. This is what comes of being patient and letting that hateful prig preach at me. Jess, it's intolerable. Oh! if Fraser had only punched his head that day when he lectured on my boots! He'd better look out though—that's all."

Madge has worked herself up into a fury, and is pacing the room like a young leopardess in a cage. Somehow she feels as though she were in a cage, or that a cage is growing round her.

"Look here, Jess," she says, "I never cared *that*" (snapping her fingers) "for Henry, and to do him justice, I don't believe he ever cared *that*" (snapping them again) "for me. He loves to tease, and domineer, and show off; and I got accustomed to it. Why, I was a child when he first came to the Vicarage! I know better now, and, as I told papa only the day before yesterday, I will not stand it. I am engaged to Mr. Fraser Ellicott, and so you can tell all the 'everybodies' who have been so busy about me."

"I'm sure I didn't mean to make mischief," pleads poor Jessie, beginning to cry.

"Oh! there's no *mischief* made that I know of. The whole thing is below contempt. The idea of Henry Wybert forming me! Don't cry, dear. I'm not angry

with you. On the contrary; I'm much obliged to you for what you have said. It clears up a good deal that has been puzzling me. There, there! be a good old Jess again; kiss me and wish me joy."

Miss Westwood wipes her eyes and gives Madge a wet cheek, but is too much taken aback to gush as is expected of her.

"You won't tell?" she sobs.

"Tell! That I didn't jilt my schoolmaster? I'm not quite an idiot, Jess. When he comes down as Fraser's best man, I dare say the 'everybodies' will be content, and mind their own business for the future."

"Oh dear! oh dear!" sighs the confidante. "When is it to be?"

"Not fixed yet. When he comes of age, I suppose. That will be in June. I

don't think I shall let him be married on his birthday. That would be a waste of fun," muses happy Madge. "What shall I make him for his birthday, Jess—slippers?"

Thus Mr. Wybert's name slips out of the conversation, which turns entirely upon Mr. Ellicott, his manners, his appearance, his opinions, his deeds (especially *the* deed), until Jessie catches her friend's happiness, and is an excellent listener.

But Madge does not go away as happy as she pretends to be. She hates the idea that any one should link her name with another than her Fraser. Though she did repeat that unladylike phrase in connection with Mr. Wybert's head, and wish that the operation had been performed, the possibility of a fuss, should the gossip of

Laremouth reach her lover's ears, frightens her. Could her father be of the "everybodies?" Had he been so hard on dear Fraser at first because he wished what everybody said to be true? Impossible! He knew Henry too well for that.

"Papa dear," she says after dinner, when the Vicar is seated by the open window enjoying his cigar. He smokes very fine cigars. In his most impecunious days he always had the best brands ripening, and Madge knows where to find the choicest. Be sure she does not give him the first that comes to hand this night. "Papa dear," she says, when she has made him quite comfortable, "there is the most absurd report going about in the village."

"There is always an absurd report going

about in the village, my love," the Vicar replies.

"Ah, but this one is about me!"

"You?"

"Yes. When I told Jessie about Fraser, she said every one thought—it is too ridiculous!—that I was going to marry Henry."

The Vicar flushes crimson, and nearly drops his cigar.

"It was most injudicious of her to repeat such—such impertinence," he exclaims.

"Oh! dear Jess blurted it out. She was so astonished when I told her about Fraser. Please don't blame *her*. After all, it is right we should know. I said I wouldn't tell; but of course I must tell you. Ought we to take any notice of it?"

"Not for the world! If it should reach Fraser!"

"Oh, I must tell Fraser!" cries Madge. "It's too good a joke to be lost."

"Madge, I insist—I—I beg you will not breathe a word about it to Fraser," pleads her father.

"Why?"

"It would—it might make mischief between them."

"Fraser and Henry?"

"Yes, my love. Indeed it might."

"I don't see how it could. Henry would say it was all nonsense; and when he comes here again——"

"I do not think he will come here again," replies the Vicar half to himself.

"What, not before my wedding? I'm sorry for that. You know, I suppose,

that Fraser is going to ask him to be best man ?"

"Fraser must do nothing of the sort!" ejaculates the Vicar. "Impress upon him, Madge, that he must do nothing of the sort. The less they have to say or do with each other now, the better it will be for both. Henry is a very passionate man, and is very angry."

"Papa, there is something in all this that I do not understand," says Madge seriously, "and that I ought to know. Why is Henry angry ?"

"Because you have accepted Fraser."

"But why—why ? Cannot he see I have grown up? Cannot he find some one else to snub ?"

"He wanted to marry you himself, my love," says the Vicar, flicking off the ash of his cigar ; "that is why he is angry."

Madge is fairly aghast. For her life she cannot utter a word. She cannot even cry out "Oh!" but stands there a living mark of admiration in blue muslin.

Her father, who (for once) is glad to have something out, goes on:

"My dear child, you have only to read his letter between the lines to see it all. Why is he surprised and distressed? Why does he—most improperly—impute meanness and treachery to Fraser? He is furious with him for coming here, and—as he supposes—snapping you up."

"And does he think," Madge replies with apparent calm, but burning with indignation within, "that I am such a thing as to be snapped up by the first man who pleases to take me? Does he imagine that it was only a question of time and opportunity, and that if he had spoken

first I should have been his? Oh, papa, papa!"

"It looks like it," replies the Vicar.

"He who hardly ever said a kind word to me!"

"That was his way."

"Ah, yes, I know! He was *forming* me! I was to be like one of those housed puppies Lord Brackton leaves with the farmers to be taken care of; and when he wanted me, and it suited his high will and pleasure to do so, I was to be led off to his kennel!"

"That is rather a coarse way of putting it, my love."

"Not coarser than the thing itself. But oh! papa, why did you not tell me at first?"

Let me answer the question. It had not suited the Vicar that his daughter

should marry any one just then. It was "my daughter! my ducats!" or rather "my daughter's ducats" with him. Marriage would carry away those six thousand pounds at one fell swoop, and the miserable dole of the High Court of Chancery would be lost with them.

Now Mr. Henry Wybert was not in a position to wed, and at the rate his practice was increasing would not be for some time to come. If, therefore, Madge must be engaged, a long engagement was convenient. Mr. Wybert had never proposed for his daughter in so many words, but had thrown out several hints of the honour for which he was forming her; and the Vicar was afraid of Mr. Wybert.

All went well until in swaggers this handsome Fraser, who was in a position to marry at once, and wanted to. The

fond father was at his wits' end. It was a good match for Madge; but how was *he* to live? That lucky letter (born, as we know, of caddis worms) turned the scale. There was no further occasion to be afraid of Mr. Wybert. Mr. Wybert might "go hang!"

Alas! it was the old case of the ladder. The good genius was kicked down.

This, however, is not the explanation given to Madge. "My dear girl must have been very blind to require being told," he replies; "that letter should have opened your eyes."

"I see now what he means," she muses; "but papa, knowing what you did, how could you have attached so much importance to it? Why, good gracious! you said it might be true after all that Fraser had done something shameful since Henry introduced him; and you led me to sup-

pose that the 'meanness' and 'treachery' might apply to it!"

He takes her hand and caresses it between his own, with a smile of affection and superiority. "My pet was angry just now at the idea of being snapped up, and yet she blames her poor old dad for making her Fraser draw one breath before he swallows her whole!"

"Papa, dear, I am old enough to be treated like a reasonable and reasoning creature. I do not blame you in the least for wishing to be certain about Fraser, but——"

"Well, well, we are certain now!"

"You don't know how unhappy you made me."

"You should not have interfered."

"Interfered! Why, papa, you gave me Henry's letter!"

"But I did not ask you to interfere, and, once for all, Margaret, as long as you are my daughter—my unmarried daughter, I mean—I will not allow you to interfere!" The rapidity with which he changes from coaxing to impatience is not lost upon her.

"Then please let it be one thing or the other, papa. Either trust me altogether, or act as you think best without me. These half confidences are—are horrid!"

"I will trust you, my darling; you have proved yourself a dear sensible girl, and really you did help me considerably. That was an excellent thought of yours about consulting Uncle Joe. Now we'll make a bargain, for you are quite right; you are old enough and reasonable enough to be consulted in this most important epoch of your life. We'll work together,

don't you see? You'll do nothing without consulting me; and I'll do nothing without consulting you; is it agreed?"

"Certainly, I do agree; and it is very kind of you, dear papa; but it is rather late now when there is nothing left to consult about."

"My love! everything has to be arranged yet. There are the settlements."

"Oh! I can't be of any help there!"

"Indeed you can. Half a dozen words from you to dear Fraser, some day when he is in a good humour, would help immensely. Young men are careless (particularly when they are in love) and forget. It would not do at all for me to remind him, you know."

"But, papa dear, do girls interfere about their settlements? I thought that the parents and the lawyers did all that."

"So they do, so they do; you can leave your interests in my hands with the greatest confidence. All I want you to do is to thank Fraser about that six thousand pounds, and explain how I stand, so as to clinch it, you know."

"It was a spontaneous offer," Madge replies, getting uneasy; "I don't see that it requires to be clinched."

"My love, it was really made to you. Such little affairs are usually arranged between the young people themselves; only you see poor Fraser was not allowed to write to you, so he wrote *at* you, to me. You would be very ungrateful, Madge, if you did not thank him."

"I'll thank him," she replies.

The word clinch is very distasteful to her. It suggests another sort of "snapping up." The Vicar, who is all eagerness to

secure his prize, attributes her coldness and reluctance to another cause, and begins reproachfully :

"Oh, my dear, if you grudge me the money——"

"How *can* you think such a thing! Grudge it to you?"

There is just a tinge of disdain in this reproach, and it is perhaps fortunate that she bursts out crying; for thus the conversation is brought to a close. He "hush hushes," and "there theres," and "poor dear child's" her, and gets her a glass of water and recommends her to go and lie down—as is usual in such cases; but what she really wants—a moral tonic—is not forthcoming.

Later on she throws a shawl over her head, and goes out to her thinking-place on the cliff.

CHAPTER VII.

UN MAUVAIS QUART D'HEURE.

MR. HENRY WYBERT, F.R.C.S., Lond., dwells in a house cunningly contrived for a member of his profession. It looks as though his brass plate and red lamp dominated a residence the rent of which would have to be written in three figures; but in reality he has only two rooms of it, all the rest belongs to round the corner, which again, viewed from its own point of vantage,

entirely absorbs Mr. Wybert. No. 23, Alexandra Gardens, is round the corner for Mr. Wybert. No. 4A, Chichester Place, is round the corner for Mrs. Magnold's select academy for young ladies.

The rising surgeon receives patients from ten till twelve, when his neat dark brougham, with a nearly thoroughbred screw in the shafts, takes him for his rounds. From six till seven he is again accessible to patients, and dines at his club at 7.30 to the minute.

At nine he is home again and stays there, unless summoned. So you will perceive that he is a young man of regular habits and much application, and one who may occupy a slice cut out of the selectest academy with the utmost propriety, otherwise you would not find his name on Mrs. Magnold's prospectus as consulting phy-

sician. But he has a hard struggle to keep this up. He has expended all his little patrimony in the purchase of that practice and that brougham, which he does not want, and whose driver could tell tales as to the "rounds." But pray do not suppose, my dear madam, that his club is also an extravagance. As he uses it, that institution is more than economical. His ambition is to become a fashionable doctor, and his acquaintance with Sir Joseph Balderson and other gentlemen of that stamp is not without its value.

He is considered clever in his profession, and is very prudent out of it; but that red lamp has only shone three years for him. The practice he bought was not a lucrative one, and, as I said, he has a hard struggle to keep up his reputation as a regular young man. What he wants is a certain

five hundred a year and a wife. With these he could ride at anchor in the slack water, and wait for the tide to lead him on to fortune.

He is well aware of such necessities, and has had his eye fixed for some time on the quarter whence they may be obtained. Madge's six thousand will yield him only about half the sum mentioned, but there are other considerations which make up for the default. In his own profession he is modest enough. He knows enough to be aware how much he has to learn, out of it he has the highest opinion of Mr. Henry Wybert. He considers that there is little worth having which that gentleman cannot get if he sets his mind upon it, and that the measures he takes for the realisation of his plans are based upon indisputable wisdom and forethought.

From this dream the news of his friend Mr. Ellicott's performance at the Vicarage awakens him somewhat rudely; and we know how he has treated it. But the Vicar's letter was not quite what he repeated to Madge. It ran in a much more apologetic and servile tone; and gave him to understand that Madge's future was at his disposal, her fate in his hands.

Remember, if you please, that a long engagement suited good Mr. Marston's book better than a good marriage. The consciousness of power is an admirable preservative of temper. Mr. Wybert ought to have kept his temper, have procrastinated with one who loved procrastination for its own sake, have taken time and wasted it, and trusted to the chapter of accidents to find some spoke to put in Mr. Ellicott's wheel of fortune. But he got in

a rage, driven by the horrid thought that he had mismanaged his own affairs, and threw down the gauntlet too soon. I imagine his dismay when he read this note:

"Laremouth Vicarage.

"DEAR HENRY,

"As you declined (no doubt for excellent reasons) to state your opinion of Mr. Ellicott's character as a suitor for our dear Madge, we have applied to my brother-in-law, Sir Joseph, who, after exhaustive inquiries, finds it entirely satisfactory. Wish us joy.

"Yours sincerely,

"FRANK MARSTON."

Wish them joy! If wishing could place the whole party—Vicar, Ellicott, Uncle Joe, all but "our dear Madge"—at the

bottom of the Red Sea, they would have been there that morning. And I do most sincerely pity the patients who called from ten till twelve.

But the worst is yet to come.

The brougham was at the door; its master's foot was on the step, the groom's finger was at his hat—when a hurried footstep clanked on the pavement, and a firm voice calls out:

"Stop! you must give me ten minutes, Wybert, before you go out."

"I have engagements, sir," he replies, turning pale.

He had been in the worst of humours all the morning. The sight of his rival—his enemy—sends him cold with rage.

"So have I," Fraser replies. "I'm going back to Beckhampton by the 1.30 train."

"What is that to me?"

"Do you want to know here before your servant? Would you like a row in the street? You can have it if you please."

"Come in," says Wybert under his voice. "Take a turn for ten minutes, Jackson" (this to the groom), "and return."

The key-hole of the surgery-door is obstinate. Fraser Ellicott throws away a half-burned cigar, and waits, breathing hard.

The door is opened at last. Wybert takes his accustomed seat. He feels strongest there, where he is wont to lay down the law.

"I detest what you call 'rows,' Mr. Ellicott, though I do not fear them for my own sake," he begins; "so I have yielded

to your wish. My time is valuable: state quickly, if you please, what is the meaning of this impertinence."

"Oh, drop that schoolmaster's jargon! I'm not a fool or a girl," says Fraser.

"Merely a very rude man. Go on."

"I came from Beckhampton this morning. I have been there for the last four days."

"Visiting principally at the Mill. I have heard of you."

"From your precious mother?"

"Did you come here to sneer at my mother, Mr. Ellicott?"

"I went to see your mother in all kindness, Wybert, and she received me very strangely. Other people received me strangely as well. I didn't notice it at the time, for I was—I was full of something else. I was excited when I came

up, seeing you slope off, and I'm sorry if I said anything rude. I hate rows too."

The motherless man did not like the look which came over the other's face as he replied to what was really a sneer at his mother; and it softened him.

"Let us leave Mrs. Wybert out of it," he added. "I have heard from others that you have been talking about Miss Marston."

"What right have you to come here to me about Miss Marston? You false friend, you—you traitor!" he cries fiercely.

"The right every man has to defend the girl that loves him," says Fraser.

"Bah! You have known her five weeks, and you have three thousand a year. Don't prate of love. You have entrapped her and her idiot of a father, and have used me shamefully."

"Will you please explain how?"

Temper again was getting the better of Mr. Wybert, but he pulled up in time.

"You had best leave Miss Marston out of it (whatever it is) also," he says, throwing himself back in his chair.

"That is impossible. Now look here, Wybert. You have called me a false friend and a traitor. Putting this and that together, I suppose you are sore at my having gone down there again and—and proposed; though hang me if I can understand why you should be so, considering the way you used to treat her." (Wybert flinches as though he had been struck.) "It's all a mystery to me why you should have allowed her name to be coupled with yours," Fraser goes on; "but you've done so, and you must undo what you've done."

"Don't use *must* to me, sir."

"Well, *shall* if you like that better," Fraser replies, warming up. "You have allowed people down at home to suppose that you were actually engaged to Miss Marston."

"Who told you I said so?"

"You didn't say so. You let others do that, and did not contradict them."

"Am I answerable for all the gossip of the place?"

"Yes, you are, if you don't stop it when you can, and it refers to yourself."

"This sort of thing will have no end," says Wybert, preparing to rise.

"Oh yes, it will; sit still," says Fraser, looking dangerous. "I'll tell you how and where it is to end. You have got to write three letters, one to the Rector of Beckhampton, one to Mr. Pryor, and one to

me, stating that you have not, and never had, the slightest right to suppose Miss Marston thought of you as a suitor."

"Never!"

"I shall not leave this room till you do it, no!" (placing his back against the door), "and you shan't, either."

"You are a stronger man than I," gasps Wybert, "you can keep me in here by brute force, but take care. I declare to God I'd kill you if I had the means."

If passionate hate had sudden death in it, there was enough in voice and look and gesture to slay a stronger man than he who stood with his back to the door.

"Don't be absurd," Fraser replies; "I don't want to use any force. Come, be a reasonable man. Why shouldn't you do as I ask? You know very well that there never was anything like an engagement,

and why the deuce shouldn't you say so?"

"What! give you the power to go about deriding and humiliating me!"

"I never thought of doing anything of the sort. I told you that people gave me the cold shoulder because they think I've cut you out unfairly, and when Madge goes down as my wife they'll be shy of her if things are not cleared up. That will never do. Now, why on earth shouldn't you say it's all a mistake, and put us right?"

"That is a very different thing from writing letters for you to show about," says Wybert doggedly. "If I do what you ask, it will be for Ma— for Miss Marston's sake, and be done in my own way. I will not be bullied by *you* into anything. If we lived in any other country, you would

not dare to do what you have done to-day."

"'I think I know what you mean; and if we lived in another country, my fine fellow, you'd have thought twice before you took liberties with a lady's name; but let us settle one thing at a time. You say you'll do what I want in your own way—all right. It's no matter to me how it's done, so that it *is* done; and I know it."

"I will write to the Rector (there is no necessity to send out circulars about it as you most injudiciously suggest), stating that I have heard with regret (on Miss Marston's account) of some foolish gossip which connects our names; and I will beg him to contradict it."

"In your name."

"Mr. Lindall is an educated man, and

knows the value of language," sneers Wybert. "There is no necessity to tell him that the contradiction is to be made in my name, when it is I who request it to be made."

"And you will write that to-day?"

"I will write it at once if doing so will relieve me from your presence."

"I'll take your word for it," Fraser says, putting on his hat. "And now look here, Mr. Wybert. Touching that hint of yours about other countries, I don't hold with what the ruck of Englishmen think of duels. I quite agree that brute force is low as a general rule, and that little men should have a chance. So that if you are for a trip to Belgium any day this week, I'm your man."

"Ah! well," Wybert answered, "I happen to agree with what you are

pleased to call the 'ruck,' and decline your proposal. I have my own ideas of how brute force should be met. Would you like to hear them?"

"Go on."

"Men like you — half educated and wholly selfish and intolerant — who rely upon your physical strength, are becoming a shame and a reproach to this country. You have lowered the tone of society, and inaugurated a reign of vulgarity and violence. You swagger through life as a sweep runs through the street, and decent people get out of your way as they get out of his, and for the same reasons. The duel did not become wicked and foolish and unlawful in our days. It was always so—it simply went out of fashion. This is very trite, but may be news for you. Do you imagine that society will revive an ex-

ploded absurdity for your sake? Pray don't flatter yourselves that you are worth the trouble. It will provide other remedies. Do you know what 'East-ending' means? No? I will tell you. It means hiring a thing called a rough to thrash a thing that calls itself a gentleman, but whose feelings are only to be reached through his hide. In America a man who behaves as you have done to me, is shot at sight. If I had had a pistol in this desk, so help me God! I would have shot you."

"And been hanged for it," is Fraser's comment.

"Perhaps; but depend upon this—bullies of your order would be more careful for some time afterwards. Well, I will not 'East-end' you. I am glad for some reasons that I had no pistol; but I carry a weapon here (striking his forehead) of

which I warn you to beware. I am your master in all except what you possess in common with a mule or a pig, and I will use my power without reservation or remorse. Look well to yourself, Fraser Ellicott; I will take every sort of advantage over you. Score up the one you have gained in the match between us, and make the most of it. My time to count is coming, and I will mark often and deeply."

"Is that all?"

"Yes. All I have to say. I have given you fair warning, fairer than you gave me. It is Brains against Brutality — we shall see which will win."

"All right," says Fraser. "And under these conditions, I shall stop and see that letter writen. Brains might think it

rather a smart thing to back out of their promise."

"As Brutality sets them the example? You said you would trust me."

"That was before your neat little speech. You are going to take every sort of advantage over me. Good! you can begin when I'm gone; but not till then. Go on, write in your own way as you said."

"No. One condition recalled, all are at an end. You shall finish as you began. Dictate your will."

"As you please. Are you ready?"

"I am." And Brains took pen and paper to write as he was told. The result was this letter:

"DEAR SIR,

"I hear that a lot of stupid people have said that me and Miss

Marston were engaged, or going to be, or something like that. It's all nonsense, for I never thought of such a thing, or she either, so please contradict in my name and tell them to mind their own business.

"Yours faithfully,

"HENRY WYBERT."

"And he thinks that will pass for *my* composition," sneered Mr. Wybert to himself as he folded it up and sealed it. "I fancy I have scored one already."

Fraser Ellicott posted the letter with his own hand to make all sure; and flattered himself that he had gotten the best of it that day. His worsted rival's threats had no effect upon him. "The poor beggar had to say something nasty," he mused. The *poor* beggar! yes, he was

sorry for him, and at heart just a little ashamed of his own part. He had bullied him. We who have followed the conversation in cold blood know that he had tried reason once or twice, and violence as often. That was his character. He was a spirited, passionate, good-hearted fellow. He brooked no opposition, and bore no malice. The other was soured and vindictive. He told the truth when he said he would have killed his tormentor if he had possessed the means. This was no idle bombast, as time will show.

CHAPTER VIII.

WERE YOU EVER JEALOUS?

THE revelations which led to that most unpleasant quarter of an hour in Mr. Wybert's consulting-room, came from Sam Pryor, who journeyed up to London that morning in company with Fraser Ellicott. Sam was keeping his terms at the Temple, and occasionally spent Saturday till Monday in the bosom of his family, and being the one son to so many daughters, he was

made a great deal of during these visits. His five fair sisters swooped down upon him like a Greek chorus, and recounted the perfidy of Miss Marston in *strophe* and *antistrophe*. "The governor" looked grave, and was afraid the bride would not have a pleasant reception amongst the Beckhamptonites; and even "the mater," who, as the parent of so many marriageable young ladies, was accustomed to be severe upon fortuneless swains, thought that Henry had been badly used. As a London man (of eighteen months' standing), Sam's opinion was asked on all sides, and he, taking the premises for granted, pooh-poohed the conclusion. Lord bless them! girls did not marry for love, nowadays. Fellows got jilted times and again. Ellicott was quite right to go in and win if he could. This was very shocking to his

sisters, for whom no prosperous suitor had as yet appeared, and did not remove the anxiety of paterfamilias, as it suited his interests that Fraser should reside on his property. Suppose he got disgusted at the coldness of the Beckhamptonites, and sold the Hall! Its purchaser might do without an agent, or find some other incumbent for that profitable office. One thing was unanimously agreed upon; they must not sit with the scornful; they must do their best to make up for other people's coldness. Hence the invitation to dinner.

In the train Sam forced the conversation towards Mr. Wybert, and, after some disparaging remarks upon that gentleman in general, expressed himself as——(something) glad that Fraser had cut him out. Fraser (who was not thinking of that gen-

tleman, and rather bored over the topic in hand) pricked up his ears at those words and asked his companion what the—— (something else) he meant.

Then out it came!

Now it is bad enough to find one's acquaintance cold and disagreeable to you when you know what is the matter. You can give cut for cut, and snap for snap, then. Or you can have it out with them, if they be worth the trouble, and put yourself, or them, right. But to become conscious that you have been snubbed without knowing it, and consequently without resenting it, is especially galling. The insult to Madge too! Madge a coquette! Madge a jilt! *His* Madge, a girl who could possibly be won by a fellow like that Wybert! Oh! it was too bad.

The irate Fraser was for stopping at the next station, going back to Beckhampton, and "having it out" with all and singular: only Sam Pryor's wiser counsel prevailed. As it was he left his luggage at Victoria and took the underground for Bayswater to "have it out" at the fountain-head. Angry at what he had heard, angry for having been civil to his detractors; angry on the top of all at seeing that fellow (as he afterwards narrated) come simpering out to his confounded brougham (what the brougham had done I cannot say), "as though butter would not melt in his mouth," we must excuse him as well as we can for the rudeness with which he greeted Mr. Wybert.

He posted that letter (which, unconscious of its glaring slips of grammar, he considered a masterpiece), hailed a hansom,

and drove to his club in the frame of mind I have attempted to indicate. There he was lifted to the seventh Heaven at finding the Vicar's telegram and a letter of the same date, commencing "My dear Fraser," giving him leave to write to Madge and suggesting the propriety of his calling upon Sir Joseph Balderson and Mrs. De Gray in order to become acquainted with the family. Not a word about being "trotted out," however, and this was fortunate; for had the happy fellow known he was being subjected to that ordeal, the evening which he passed with Uncle Joe would have gone off less agreeably. But he was "trotted out."

It was very nice to call pretty Mrs. De Gray "Bell," and to be made tell her all about it—everything! She was the first interested confidante he had had—old

Mrs. Aymes and Hazeltine didn't count—and you may be sure he made the most of the occasion. Why, it was almost as good as making love to Madge over again, to tell Madge's sister how he had wooed and won her—to say over again what he thought she thought of this and what she looked as though she thought at that; till the sublime moment on the rustic bench where the robins were fed, when he took her two hands in his, and said—nothing.

Bell, whose wedding march had been a one year's hard struggle, a four years' promenade of happiness and triumph, saw something of the fire of her sixpenceless man in the honest eager eyes which held her, and thought what a lucky girl was little Madge. She would begin all right. No one would taunt *her* about a good-for-nothing mercenary lover—no delicate allu-

sions to the workhouse for her. She kissed him when he had finished, and the rascal had the impertinence to declare afterwards, that one of the advantages of being engaged to Madge was that you (meaning himself) might kiss "Bell."

The result of this interview was a further "pleasant little surprise" for the Vicar. His affectionate Bell insisted (there was no occasion to insist, but it was nice to put it so) upon providing dear little Madge's *trousseau* herself, and Madge must come and stay with her for at least a month, to choose what she liked and look about a little before she was married. Poor Bell had not much practical experience of *trousseaux*. The luggage had not troubled her sixpenceless man on their ten days' honeymoon, and she remembered what it had cost her once to ask him for a new

dress. The difficulty now was to curb her husband in a wild career of extravagance of which she was the object and excuse; to prevent his plunging into shops on his way home and buying dozens of things she did not want, at twice their value. Fraser might do the same—in time; but dear little Madge should start as spruce as ever she could make her.

So Bell scattered roses on our lover's path; and all unwittingly planted a thorn.

"I like you immensely," she told Fraser in her frank way, the second time they met (which was on the second day they knew each other), "and it's such an immense" (Bell was tautological when she gushed) "relief."

"To have Madge married?" he asked.

"To have her married to the right man.

I was awfully afraid—but it's no use talking now."

"Yes, it is. I'm never tired of talking about Madge," said the lover.

"I was afraid of that Mr. Wybert," said Bell.

Fraser got uncomfortable, and if he could have got vexed with Bell he would have done it.

"And do you, who know her, really think," he asked reproachfully, "that she could ever have cared for that fellow?"

"No," Bell replied quickly, "but she might have been worried into accepting him. Papa is unfortunately under great obligations to Mr. Wybert."

"Which he took out by being intolerably overbearing to your sister."

"You were there together—at Laremouth I mean—for some time, were you not?"

"Yes, nearly a month. He introduced me, as I told you."

"Now truth, Fraser! were you ever jealous?"

"Lord, no! Not now."

"But were you ever?"

"Well, he called her *Madge*, and lectured about her dress, and her boots. I didn't like that. It seemed too familiar, you know; but I wasn't jealous a bit."

"I'm glad of that."

"Why?"

"Because I shouldn't like you to fall out."

"Madge told me that you and he didn't hit it."

"No, we did not," Bell replied decisively.

"Then why should you care?"

"Because Mr. Wybert is a very danger-

"I doubt it. He's not the man to let such a thing blow over. He is sly and revengeful."

"Let him be. What harm can he do me?"

"I don't know."

"Or Madge?"

"He won't try to harm her."

"You don't mean to say you think he loves her?" Fraser demands, flushing up.

"Not as you do," said Bell.

"Ah! then I don't care."

"He loves himself, his own ease, his own ambition, his own plans; and all these, if I am not mistaken, turned upon my sister. He is egotistic; he likes to succeed. He is ambitious, and marriage into such a family as papa's would have helped him up into the world he worships. He is insufferably conceited, and thinks his

ways must win. You have struck him in the most tender places. It will not be so much because he loves Madge, as because he hates you, that he will be dangerous. He won't try to hurt her—except through you—because he is so dogged that he will not confess himself beaten until—until——"

"The twenty-ninth of next June," laughed Fraser Ellicott.

"Why, you impatient wretch!" says Bell, catching the infection, "are you going to be married on your birthday?"

"Why not? Don't you see the economy of it, Bell? One set of presents and one party will do. Young married people should be economical, you know. Now, like a good old sister, do tell Madge that it ought to be my birthday. What's the good of waiting after that?"

"You are a sordid creature."

"Well, that day week. It would be jolly to have two anniversaries in a week."

"But the economy?"

"Oh, bother the economy!" cries this unreasonable man.

Then he began pumping Bell about the proprieties. Might not he go down to Laremouth now? Wasn't the Vicar's letter almost an invitation? This recalls some disagreeables which had arisen during her sixpenceless man's later visits to Laremouth as her betrothed, and now the matron repeats the very platitudes which were so distasteful to the maid.

"Better not just now," she advises. "If poor mamma were alive, or I were there—don't you see, better not? Be a good patient boy, and wait till she comes here;

then you shall see her every day, and nobody shall look."

So all appears to be *couleur de rose*. Fraser writes to his Madge, and Madge writes to her Fraser every day. What every one thought at Laremouth is not confided to the gentleman, and why people were cold at Beckhampton is not explained to the lady. They are in unconscious unanimity that Mr. Wybert's name is not to appear in the correspondence. As time goes on Fraser drops him entirely out of his mind, and Madge—well, Madge begins to fret herself about him more and more every day.

Whether women should be angry or indignant at the pretensions of unfavoured suitors need not be here discussed. That a woman never is really angry or indignant

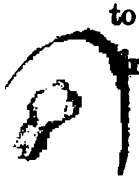
at being made love to is too plain a proposition to need discussion. She may be, and ought to be, angry with a swain who proposes too soon. Proposing to her without making love is flattering yourself at her expense.

The sting in Mr. Wybert's conduct to Madge was in its coldness. He was to "form her," forsooth, into a wife before he had softened her into a sweetheart. If he had made fierce love to her, and had then gone forth and told the gossips that she was dying for him, it would not have been so bad. And she is right.

It seems to her now as wicked to think of marriage without promising love, as it will do hereafter to promise love without thinking of marriage. She asks herself, over and over again, how could he think of her as a wife, and treat her like a

Mr. Barlow? and gradually an answer is formed. It is formed out of scraps and fragments, forgotten words that come back to her at her thinking-place in the sobbing of the waves at her feet, tricks of voice and changes of face, of which the flying clouds remind her in the solitude of the cliff. Not one line have they received from Wybert. Uncle Joe mentions having met him "looking like his ghost," and innocently asks what is the matter? Bell understands he is going to sell his practice in Westburnia, having received an appointment in the West Indies.

Once or twice Jessie Westwood has spoken of him as "poor fellow," and then turned red and stammered out something to cover up the slip. What had happened to make him look like his ghost, and desire to leave the country, poor fellow?



She finds herself repeating in her own thoughts the phrase she had snapped at Jessie for using only a day or two ago! And the nail of her left great toe is growing into the flesh, just as he told her it would assuredly do if she persisted in wearing those high heels.

This is frightfully unromantic. It reminds me of the lady in the legend "who didn't mind death, but she could not stand pinching."

It must be mentioned, though, as it leads musing Madge to form a different estimate of the "poor fellow." In this business of heels he was right. She cannot walk to her thinking-place without being painfully reminded of that fact. And she was wrong to have been obstinate, just—as she put it to her angry self—to spite him. Was he lame? Did he

care? Well, perhaps he would care if he knew. He had meant to be kind. Is not trying to save one from pain almost the same thing as trying to give one pleasure?

How small a cause will make our anger glance, and then at what wide angles will the bolts diverge! Madge remembers that she has been snubbed and domineered over for years without knowing it, till Fraser put her up to rebel. Was it really snubbing and domination? She gets less and less sure on this point as she goes on.

The rapid changes in her father's conduct trouble her. She does not feel *safe*. He has changed once, and may change again. Fraser is king of men now, and Henry "may go hang!" "Is this fair—fair, of course, to Henry, after all his ser-

vices?" Madge finds herself asking the winds and the waves. Surely papa might be kind to Fraser (that was natural) without forgetting what he owed to Henry? *He* had liked being "formed;" had put himself willingly into the mould, and made no wry faces, however tightly it was pressed. Now when informed that his good genius is going about "looking like a ghost," he replies, "Well, my love, he *is* a ghost," and chuckles as he finishes his breakfast.

She is quick enough to see that the situation turns upon that six thousand pounds, and an uneasy suspicion that (so far as her father is concerned) she has been bought and sold, begins to grow.

Oh! if Henry had not been so foolish—how he could have helped her! Oh! if Fraser thought—if he should ever come

to think—that she had snapped him up because he was rich, what should she do?

It is well, you perceive, for Madge that she does not know what people have been saying at Beckhampton.

Kind-hearted Jessie Westwood thinks to soften Madge's *quondam* wrath against Mr. Wybert by assuring her that he was fond of her—poor man!—in his way; and she recalls many little acts and words in support of this theory. He would have begun making love (in what he thought) good time, if Fraser had not been too quick for him. That was why he was so angry with Fraser. That was why he called him mean and treacherous.

"Of course, he thinks he had a chance," urges Miss Westwood, "before Fraser came, and so is furious with himself for

having lost it. We let ourselves put ourselves out of temper, my dear, a great deal more than we let any one else; although some one else always has to stand the blame. If he had not cared for you, it would have delighted him to meddle and fuss, as you say, over your wedding."

Thus Miss Westwood, partly to justify herself for having supposed Wybert to be the happy man when Madge so boisterously announced her engagement, and partly to move her to be sorry for the "poor man," and so make peace. Jessie loves to make peace for its own sake; but even she, who knows next to nothing of Mr. Wybert, has an idea that peace with him is prudent, as well as lovely.

So Madge's anger oozes away, and she does get sorry for the "poor man;" sorry

that her father is treating him so ungratefully; sorry that he and Fraser cannot be friends; and sorry that it is all through her.

CHAPTER IX.

IN A NEW "THINKING-PLACE."

MADGE and Bell (one gives the *pas* to one's heroine) have not seen much of each other since the latter's highly imprudent marriage. Whilst the sixpenceless man was struggling, the Vicar did not encourage visits to Laremouth. Bell had not behaved well, and, as a father, he was not justified in allowing his younger child to be influenced by the picture of successful obstinacy and

disobedience which Mrs. De Gray presented. Besides, there was no telling how long a visit from this impecunious pair might last, or what uninvited guest might turn up during their stay.

When the consequences of disobedience and obstinacy were gilded by success, and the example became more dangerous than ever, there was no lack of invitations; but the coldness was then on the other side. There was a time when a trip to the sea-side might have saved poor Bell from much suffering if she could only have put her pride in her pocket, and asked leave to come where her husband was sneered at. But she couldn't—a further sign of her stiff-neckedness and perversity.

Prosperity is the best of peacemakers. It washed the good-for-nothing adventurer white as the driven snow. Nothing

like Pactolus for bleaching purposes; and when the six thousand pounds went back, and he had nothing of Mr. Marston's but his daughter, they might stay as long as they pleased, and bring the dear children.

They would come as soon as he and Madge had visited them, and as it had not suited Mr. Wybert that she should go to London, things hung in this position till the young lady's approaching marriage, and the fall of the good genius made the balance topple in favour of the De Grays.

The Vicar and Madge paid the first visit, and for the latter it was full of delight. Dear Bell was so kind; dear Fraser was so good. Everything was so new and bright and charming.

"Only think," she wrote Jessie, "I have

been to two balls, the opera, and a flower-show, all in one week!"

Only one thing she missed—her thinking-place on the cliff, whither she might slip away and digest these delights in her mind. She soon found a thinking-place in Kensington Gardens, not ten minutes' walk from her sister's house, which at her hour for thinking (generally before breakfast) was as deserted as the dear old nook at home. Lonely so long, she could not do without some solitude, if only to "bring out," as artists say, the bright colouring of the picture in which she now figured.

She has returned from one of these rambles and finds Bell breakfasting in bed (a sure sign that Horace is away on business), and, *àpropos* of nothing, asks:

"Couldn't you invite Henry to dinner some day?"

Bell puts down her cup and looks astonished.

"What would Fraser say?" she asks.

"I want them to be friends. I shall tell Fraser that he must be civil and—and make it up," says Madge.

"You forget that it may not rest entirely with Fraser to do that," suggests her sister.

"Then he can stay away. Bell dear, I think papa is not treating poor Henry well, and I do so hate to look ungrateful."

"Papa called on him and he has not returned his visit."

"Yes; he left a card when he knew he wasn't at home. I don't think that is anything when we've been so intimate. If there hadn't been any fuss and he had only

left a card here, what should we have thought?"

Bell knows that Wybert must not meet Ellicott or be invited in his absence, but cannot say why, being pledged to secrecy as to that unpleasant quarter of an hour in the surgery. Mrs. Grundy finds her with a means of escape.

"Well, dear, when Horace comes home you can mention it to him. Men do these sort of things, you know, with men; and Mr. Ellicott is not on my visiting list."

Bell's Wednesday came, Horace or no Horace, and Uncle Joe is there as surely as comes the following Thursday.

"Uncle Joe," says Madge, "I want you to do something for me." Madge is in high favour, but the ex-diplomatist will not promise in the dark. "I want you to tell

Henry—Mr. Wybert, you know, that we want him—*I* want him to come here, and call upon papa and—and not be horrid."

"My love, if he's 'horrid' he had much better keep away. We don't want horrid people here."

"Oh, you know what I mean—stiff and huffy. I'm sure papa would like to be friendly, and Uncle Joe" (sinking her voice and picking at his *boutonnière*) "is he really looking ill?"

"Well, he has changed, certainly. Men don't usually look cheerful under such a come-down as his."

Up goes the crimson flag. How did Uncle Joe mean? For an instant she imagines that he knows everything, and feebly pleads:

"Indeed it wasn't my fault."

"Yours! Why, what on earth could you have to do with his break-up?"

First it was his "come-down;" now it is his "break-up." Madge is fairly puzzled.

"Uncle, what is a 'break-up'?"

"In his case, Madge, it means keeping a carriage when you cannot afford it; getting into debt, borrowing money at ten per cent., and making five of your capital, neglecting your business where you can live, and having to take an appointment when you cannot."

"You mean to say he is ruined?" Madge gasps.

"Something very like it."

"Oh, I am so sorry!"

"So am I," replies Uncle Joe. "He was a promising man, and if he could have been content to mount the ladder from the

bottom, he might have done well. But he must needs take a flying jump at the middle, and (as our young friends say) he has come a cropper."

"Oh, Uncle Joe, how can you? Don't talk in that light way. We have known him so long, and it is so shocking. I thought he was only vexed with us, and—and like that. This alters the case. Papa shall go and see him. Perhaps he doesn't even know we are in town. Has he left where he used to live?"

"I believe so."

"Where is he now?"

"Indeed I don't know."

"You said he was going somewhere where he could not live. What does that mean?"

"He has got some small appointment I hear, at Barbadoes."

"That's in the West Indies?"

"Yes."

"Where people die of yellow fever?"

"Well, they don't all die," replies Uncle Joe.

Some one claims his attention, and he turns aside just in time. Madge has to unclasp her hands to feel for a chair, and shows that her pretty creamy gloves are in rags, as she sinks into it with a long sob.

Ruined! It does not seem to the now weeping girl that this sort of ruin is a fruit slow to ripen. Barely a month has passed since her flag of revolt was raised; still she thinks it is all her fault. Her warm and generous heart bleeds for the ruined man, and the last shade of resentment against his high and mighty ways vanishes in the thought, "Oh, how he must feel it!"

"Ruined because he neglected his business and ran into debt! Perhaps his visits to Laremouth on papa's business were the primary cause of his losses; and oh! what if papa should have got him compromised in some way about money, and all through me—all through me!" she sobs.

This comes at night when Madge has undressed as a matter of form and is sitting up in bed with her hands clasped round her knees. No sleep for her. As soon as the servants are down she starts for her thinking-place, and is half way there when a thought strikes her.

"It will be all the better," she observes, speaking to herself as was her wont, "to be able to say where he lives, and as he has left his house there cannot be any harm in your calling to ask where he has moved to."

She had made up her mind that her father should seek Mr. Wybert, and if possible help him over his troubles in turn; and she is now making for where Mr. Wybert used to live in order to discover where he is now to be found. As she passes the door of Mrs. Magnold's select academy, the discovery is made.

He raises his hat gravely, and makes way for her to pass on the driest part of the flags.

"Oh, Henry, won't you speak to me?" she asks piteously, shrinking from his formal salutation as though from a blow.

"I have nothing that would interest you, Miss Marston, to communicate," he replies stiffly. "I should have said won't you let me speak to you?"

"Oh, Henry, I do so want to assure you that we are not ungrateful, and—and

that you have all our sympathy in your misfortunes."

"May I venture to inquire who are included in the word 'our'?"

"Uncle Joe is sorry, and I am sorry—so sorry, Henry, and we are the only two that know. I am going to tell papa after breakfast, and I'm sure he will be shocked. Uncle Joe said you had moved, and so I walked round—I always take a walk before breakfast—to try and find out where you had gone. There is no harm in that, is there, Henry?"

Never had her face so softened to him. Never had it borne so docile an expression.

"We had better not stand here," he replies, in part answer to her question. "If you would not mind prolonging your walk in the direction of the Gardens——"

"I always go there," she interrupts gaily.

"Do come if you can spare the time. Ah, I forgot!" Her face falls again as she remembers that ruined men have plenty of spare time. There is a deference, almost a tenderness in her manner, for which he cannot account.

"What has Sir Joseph told you about me?" he asks, as they walk back slowly towards her thinking-place.

"That you are going to Barbadoes," she replies, skipping details, and coming at once to what she considers the crown of the edifice of ruin.

"Judging from the past month, you can do very well without me. Why should any of you be sorry for my going to Barbadoes?" he asks.

"I can only answer for myself now," she says; and again he notes how soft is voice and look. "I am sorry, because I

think that your mis—dear Henry, tell me the truth: have you neglected your own interests for ours? Is it anything you have done for papa that—that—" (it comes out at last with a burst of tears) "*has ruined you?*"

"Hush, Madge, this is foolish! There, take my arm. Now you really must not cry; dry your eyes, and listen to me. I think I understand what is passing in your mind. Sir Joseph Balderson is one of a large class which is incapable of drawing any but the worst and most vulgar conclusions. Many people who are ruined go to the colonies. I am going to the colonies, therefore I am ruined. That, I suppose, is Sir Joseph's explanation?"

"Why, Henry, you don't mean to say that it isn't true?"

"Would you be glad to know it is not?"

"Oh, so glad!" she cries, dashing aside the tears that will come. "Say it is not true, Henry."

He looks her full in her eager face—lit with, perhaps, the sweetest of all smiles, the smile through tears—and wonders why he had never thought her beautiful till now.

"You are a grateful and a generous girl, Madge," he answers her, pressing the hand which rests on his arm. "I cannot confide in you every reason that I have for going abroad for a time, but you can rest assured of this much, Sir Joseph Balderson is quite mistaken. Many a man in a better position than I ever held would be glad to accept the appointment which is offered to me. I am content to take it because it involves change of scene, and life, and thought. I have heard that a few thou-

sand miles of blue water are good for my complaint."

"You are looking very ill," she says; "what is the matter?"

"A serious lesion of my self-esteem," he tells her, with a scoffing laugh. "I set my heart upon something, and lost it for want of proper seeking. Bah! you know what I mean, Madge."

She does, and she feels they are getting on their ice, but for the life of her she cannot resist saying:

"What is not worth seeking is not worth having. Console yourself with the conviction that you were wise not to seek."

"Perhaps I may be able to do so—at Barbadoes."

"Why not here?" she asks.

"Here!" he cries passionately, turning

round upon her. "Here in your presence? Are you a heartless coquette or a fool, Madge? Well, well, I treated you like a child till it was too late. I have no right to reproach you. There, don't look so astonished; I promise not to break out again. So your father is in town? Staying with Mrs. De Gray, I presume?"

"Why, of course!"

"There was no address on his card."

"How tiresome! That was it then?" cries Madge, pleased and triumphant. "You would have come to see us if you had known—wouldn't you, Henry?"

"I don't think so, Madge."

"Why not?"

"I have a bowing acquaintance with your sister; but her salutations say distinctly, 'I do not want to cut you, only

pray don't call.' I have taken the hint, and shall keep it."

"Only tell me where papa can call on you, and he *shall*," says impulsive Madge.

"I beg that you will leave your father to follow his own inclinations. If he wishes to see me, he can call again."

"Then you haven't moved?"

"No, and I shall not. The gentleman who is nominally going into partnership with me will occupy my rooms during my absence."

"Oh! then you are not going away for good?"

"I hope so. If we were as we once were, Madge, I should ask you not to use that phrase 'for good.' Don't you see how it has perverted your meaning?"

How kindly he speaks now. "When we were as we were," she muses, repeating

his formula, "he would have snapped me up with a sneer, called me vinegar or provincial, and ordered me not to do it again." She hears a sigh, and it all but brings up her thoughts. "Thank you, Henry," is all she says.

She has never thanked him for correcting her before; and it makes him thrill as he looks in her face and sees no shade of irony there. Is this Madge Marston, clad daintily in a two browns silk, which fits her from neck to waist like another skin, and a natty little felt hat to match?—this young lady, *bien chaussée, bien gantée,* who gives him so sweet a 'thank you'—is this the little girl who used to run wild on the Laremouth Downs, in a torn cotton frock, and toss her tangled locks with a frown when he set her right? The change he sees is the very one he hoped to make.

He cannot yet realise that for not making it he has himself alone to blame. Hard and hot as is his gaze, it does not yet get beyond the milliner's work.

"It is that cursed money," he mutters, when they have parted. "If I could have brought her to town, given her fine clothes, and sent her amongst fine people, she would soon have picked up their ways. She is an actress, like all her sex, and dressing a part well is half-way towards playing it. I wonder who put her up to the grateful? Not her father, I'll be bound. It's that cur Ellicott's work. He is afraid of me, and wants peace. Grateful! A Marston grateful! I've done with them."

He thinks so. With the wave of hands which accompanies the half-uttered resolve, he thinks that he puts them aside

once and for ever. But Madge's fresh young face, with its tears and its smiles, haunts him. His cold heart is warmed by her beauty, and is nearer to loving her than it has ever been. And oh! how he hates the man who has won her from him!

He orders his page to say "Not at home" if a tall gentleman dressed like a clergyman should call. He has done with them—with him, at any rate; but not with Kensington Gardens at seven o'clock in the morning!

Madge trots home, and is greeted with: "Why, darling, how well you look! I was afraid we had been over-taxing you, you looked so worn last night." This from Bell.

Nothing is said about making papa be good to poor Henry. The ground, you

see, is partly cut from under this plan. Henry is not "poor." Madge sees a way to bring it all right again through Fraser, and, regardless of that wise proverb which bids us begin nothing of which we have not well considered the end, she flies at Uncle Joe the next time they meet, and scolds him for "being so unkind" about Mr. Wybert. She warmly denies the "cropper."

"Henry is going to Barbadoes because he likes to," she concludes, "and he *hasn't* left his house, and he *hasn't* put down his brougham, and he does not owe a *sixpence* —there!"

Uncle Joe naturally inquires how she knows all this, and is told the honest truth. She met Mr. Wybert by accident, and condoled with him.

"Well, my love," replies Sir Joseph, "I

suppose he knows best; but look here, Madge—don't meet him *by accident* again."

At this warning she blushes up to the roots of her hair.

She has met him again by accident. Kensington Gardens are not her property. Other people may walk there. Besides, is she not going to bring it all right in her own way?

Uncle Joe does not quite believe that young men go to Barbadoes because they like to, still he keeps his promise to Madge made after the slight confusion which followed his warning, and contradicts the cropper at his club. Being a kind-hearted old gentleman, and one of a school which does not deem it "good form" to make a mistake and stick to it, he actually apologises to Mr. Wybert for his share in spreading the scandal.

Where is the truth? Much nearer to the facts according to Uncle Joe than to those stated by Mr. Wybert. Nevertheless, there is a possibility that he may not go to Barbadoes after all.

see me, or were you

see you," he replies.
uncle last night, and
you for silencing those
It was very kind of
You, at least, are genuine

Henry. Say grateful, and

nothing to be grateful for.
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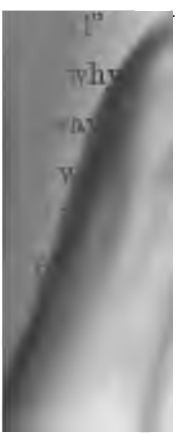
right now."
it ever have been?"



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CHAPTER X.

"BY THIS KISS, I WILL."

MADGE has met Mr. Wybert again *by accident.* When next she seeks her new thinking-place, she finds him there, and is not surprised. He has a haggard, hunted look in his face, which grieves her to see.

"So you are here again?" he says, as they saunter on.

"I might say the same thing to you," she replies, as gaily as she can.

"Did you come to see me, or were you passing?"

"I came to see you," he replies. "I met your uncle last night, and want to thank you for silencing those absurd stories. It was very kind of you, Madge. You, at least, are genuine and——"

"Grateful, Henry. Say grateful, and believe it."

"You have nothing to be grateful for. I was going to say something else; but it would not be right now."

"Would it ever have been?"

"Oh yes!"

"Then why not now? What is right once is always so—isn't it?"

"The word on my lips was 'affectionate,'" he goes on, looking her steadily in the face; "genuine and affectionate.

Poor little Madge! Girls like you are born to suffer."

"That's not a kind prediction, Henry; and, as things stand—excuse me—not a generous one. If you and Fraser have fallen out, that is no reason why I should suffer."

He makes no reply. He cannot.

"Do you often come here?" he asks, after an awkward pause.

"Sometimes. I must have a thinking-place. Do you remember how often you used to scold me for haunting my dear old nook on the cliff at home? How you used to tell me I had nothing to think about and had better be darning my frocks?"

"You had little to think about then."

"Oh yes I had. Ever so many things. I used to brood and fret over—such nonsense."

"My scoldings for example?"

"No, I don't think I minded them much."

"That is frank. Well, you have more than nonsense to think over now."

"Yes, indeed! I often wonder if I shall make him really happy," she replies dreamily.

"Put it the other way. Have you asked yourself seriously if he can ever make you *really* happy? A false friend may make a false husband."

"I will not allow you to say he is a false friend—how dare you, Henry!" she cries, with flashing eyes.

"He *was* a false friend. He well knew that I loved you, Madge, and sneaked down there to win you away from me."

"Away from you! Much you had done to win me for yourself. Away from you!

you must have lost your senses to talk like this."

"No, I have found them—but too late. Why did he not tell me he was going again to Laremouth? He owed it to me, for I had introduced him to you. Why did he not write and say, 'Wish me joy, Madge Marston has accepted me'? Because he dared not. The first intimation I had of his—his falsehood, was your father's letter asking my consent—ha! ha!—my consent to your marriage."

"So this was why you called him 'treacherous and mean'?"

"Was it not treacherous? Was it not mean?" he retorts, his whole frame quivering with anger.

"Do try to be reasonable, Henry," she says, rather frightened by his violence; "I am going to talk to you as you used to talk

to me when I used big words foolishly. How you used to scold me for calling things *awfully* this or that! Well, you're just as bad now. What is a traitor? what is treacherous? A traitor is one who is false to somebody to whom he owes obedience. Treachery is the falseness he commits. Did Fraser owe you obedience? Surely you cannot think that because you introduced him to us he was to say, 'If you please, sir, do you want to make love to Miss Marston? because if you don't, I would like to try?' Just reflect how utterly absurd it would have been!"

"As you put it, it is absurd," he replies, biting his pale lips; "but you do not put it fairly. His whole conduct shows that he knew my secret and cruelly supplanted me."

"You kept your secret remarkably well,

Mr. Wybert," says Madge, with a curl of her lip.

"From you, too well; but it was no secret to others, Madge."

She suddenly remembers what had passed between her and her father, and what Jess Westwood had let out that day when she went to be congratulated. His voice is low and broken, his manner humble and sad. She feels what he would say if he dared. She knows that he has said, though not in so many words, "I loved you, I love you still."

If she could turn round and run away she would do so; but she cannot. His shaft, drawn at a venture, has gone home. She may not contradict him, for London life has not yet rubbed the truth out of her. She is not able to parry the thrust or return it as a well-seasoned young lady might do.

Her very honesty keeps her defenceless and silent.

"I have not a word," he goes on in the same tone, "to urge in my own excuse. I have behaved like an idiot, and must suffer for my own fault; but when I see you sacrificed, Madge, I cannot hold my tongue."

"Sacrificed?"

"Yes, sacrificed. What do you know about this man who proposes for you after seeing you perhaps twenty times? What does any one know? What does he know of you? Why, he would not have bought a horse on the knowledge he thinks enough to recommend a wife! And you, poor trusting child! think you love him."

"I do love him," she replies loyally.

"You think you love him," he repeats.

"You have me and yourself. I am sure of that. But you have been bought and sold, Madge Morrow, and you will know it some day when it is too late to undo the bargain."

Another minute more. That wretched six thousand pounds! Could he know about it? He has been weighing his words with great care, watching her face as he speaks them. He sees angry flushes rise: he sees her lips part in the very act of passionate protest. The red blood flows back to her chilled heart and the mobile mouth quivers with silent pain. He knows he has hit the blow.

"It is not a pleasant task," he continues, "or, as the world wags, a wise one to warn a child against her father. I have had some experience of yours, Madge, and—to say the least—I do not find him a prudent

man. Your sister is a woman, who, owing all she has to a lucky marriage, naturally thinks matrimony to be the aim and the end of all girls' ambition. Your counsellors are few, my poor Madge! and there is little wisdom amongst them. Your own heart will guide you right if you examine it well, and put vanity out of it—yes, dear, *vanity!* all girls are vain. What nine out of ten call love—is only flattered vanity. Ask your heart if it can trust this man whom you have known a bare two months, with your young life. If it should say 'yes, ask it sternly why? and take no light answer. Don't let them hurry you into this marriage. A friend without hope to be anything dearer, bids you pause. Take time. What is a year at your age? Be just to him, Madge. Would you like him to say hereafter, or even to think, 'Oh, I

was snapped up by those people because I was rich.'"

"It would kill me," she whispers to herself with a shudder.

"You hint that I have fallen out with Mr. Ellicott," he goes on; "you are mistaken. He has fallen out with me; I cannot tell you why. It is of a piece with all his behaviour; but this has nothing to do with the advice I give you. I am thinking of your happiness, Madge; not that of Mr. Ellicott. Try him; find him true and worthy; and if we meet again, I will frankly ask his pardon for anything I have involuntarily done to offend him, and rejoice in his happiness almost as though it were my own."

"You have bewildered me so," she replies, "that I really do not know what to say. I ought to be very angry with

you for speaking as you have done; I ought not to have listened to a great deal you have said. You must never talk to me again like this, and I will not come here again; but you mean kindly, Henry, I can see that, and forgive you."

"I would rather you said 'thank you.'"

"You have made me very unhappy."

"I have made you think. Thought, Madge, is the crucible in which one separates the true metal from the dross."

"With fire," she muses.

"Yes, dear; better fire now, than tears hereafter."

"We are getting quite poetical," she says, with an hysterical sob, "and my sister will be waiting breakfast. The best thing you can do, Henry, is to forget all about me, and leave me to gang my ain gait, as the Scotch say. When you come back from

Barbadoes I shall hold you to your promise, and make you and Fraser shake hands. I dare say if the truth were known you have quarrelled about me, and Henry" (with a sob), "I'm not worth quarrelling about."

So she left him. Left him quite satisfied with his morning work. Left him with those words *bought and sold* rankling in her heart. Free from the spell of that false voice and crafty eye, she wonders why she had been with him so long—why he had even slided into calling her "dear," and she had not resented it! She must not see him again until after she had been married, oh! a long time! What would Fraser say if he knew? Ought she to tell him? Should she put off their marriage? She had herself fixed the day. What excuse could she possibly give to delay it now? She could not find one—Fraser

would not make one. She felt like a log in a whirlpool, carried on in spite of herself.

Sometimes she caught herself thinking what would have happened if she had never seen Fraser Ellicott, and wondering when and in what fashion Henry Wybert would have changed from the schoolmaster into the lover. Often she wished that Fraser would speak to her gravely and tenderly as Henry had done.

"It would do you good, you silly thing," she told herself, "to be found fault with and contradicted, but he thinks you perfection, and you know you're no such thing. Oh dear, oh dear; if there were only a good fairy about in these days to come in the shape of an old charwoman, have something kind done to her, and give me three wishes, I'd wish for these

two to be rolled up into one—Fraser to love me and Henry to make me good; and then to feel quite safe, and then to be—but if I were only *safe* I should be happy. No, I would wish to make them happy; I mean him. Good gracious! is not the world wide enough for two men to choose out of?" She had said pretty much the same thing to the cock robins, if you remember.

It so happened that Fraser was more than usually attentive this day, or at least she thought so. For the first time during their engagement, her lover bored her.

"I wish to goodness you'd find something to scold me about for a change," she said, when he joined her in the drawing-room after dinner. "You'll spoil me if you go on like this, and it's *so* insipid."

"What am I to scold about?"

"Oh, lots of things! I'm not a canary-bird to be fed with sugar and say 'tweet.'"

"When I was at Oxford," he replies demurely, "I had a little dog named Fizz, and when she had anything upon her mind, she used to come into the room with a penitential expression on her face, and her tail between her legs. I immediately administered a slight correction, and made her happy. The light came back to her eyes and the wag to her tail. She could not say, 'If you please, sir, I've stolen that half fowl that the scout put away for a grill,' or 'I worried a corner of the hearth-rug and want to be whipped and have it over.' She was only a dumb beastie, Madge. You can talk; have you been stealing anything?"

"Fraser!"

"Or tearing the carpet?"

"I am not your dog, sir."

"No, darling, but you must excuse my saying that you go down a little that way when you want me to scold about 'lots of things' without knowing in the least what they are. If you have anything on your mind, out with it. What have you been doing?"

"Oh, nothing! what can girls do in these days? we are born, and marry, and put on clothes, and eat, and drink, and die. I do so wish you were poor."

"You'd have to strike three items out of your list if I were," he laughs; "you wouldn't put on many clothes when your *trousseau* was worn out, or eat and drink much then, Madge."

"If I were a man, I should be ashamed to admit that I could not make a living for myself," she snaps.

"I don't admit anything of the sort. I could do a good many things. I could sail a fellow's yacht, drive a hansom, be a game-keeper or a billiard-marker, first rate; but I think being the husband of Mrs. Ellicott, of the old Hall, Beckhampton, would suit me best."

"Suppose I were to bring you bad luck?"

"My dear Madge, the same beneficent Providence which denied me brains, made me independent of luck. I'm not a City man. I don't think that my trustees have lent a shilling of my money to Peru. I don't gamble, thank goodness! and Beckhampton is not subject to earthquakes that I know of. With the commonest prudence, we can live like gentlefolks upon our income, improve our property, and snap our fingers at luck."

"I was not thinking about money; and

please, don't talk about *our* income and *our* property—it's all yours. I can only bring you happiness; and suppose that did not come? Suppose, after a few years, you were to ask yourself, 'Why did I marry that girl?'"

"I should reply, 'Because I loved her.'"

"But if you didn't love me then?"

"I should call myself an infernal cad; and if a man could knock himself down, I'd do it. Why, who has been putting this nonsense into your head? Not Bell, surely?"

"Oh no! Bell doesn't believe in luck."

"Nor do I. When people make fools of themselves, they catch a scape-goat, heap their follies on his back, and call him Bad Luck. When Good Luck comes, we call him energy, perseverance, talent."

"Yes, but what do kind friends say? They make out, for example, that Horace De Gray is a lucky man; and if he had failed, they would have said it was all his own fault. There is such a thing as luck, Fraser, or else how did I——"

"Go on," he said, winding his arm round her. "This is getting interesting. How did you——"

"Feel a warning that you ought to know me better before you marry me," she says.

"That is not what you were going to say."

"It is what I have said."

"It is not what you were going to say, Madge. Look me full in the face. You were going to say something very different."

She could not lift her face to his. It fell on his shoulder, and she began to cry.

"My darling!" he whispered. "I shall know you better, and I shall love you better the more I know you. You will do the same by me, please God. The risk is yours, not mine. Take back your promise if you fear——"

"No, no, no!" she interrupts, drawing closer to him! "I was going to say—or else how did I win you? The risk is yours, dear, all yours."

"Then I accept it, and there isn't another word to be said."

"Just one," she replies, moving away, and now confronting him. "If some great trouble should come upon you through me, you will let me share it with you—you will let me fight it down with you—you will let us triumph over it together."

"By this kiss, I will."

When he had gone, she was furious with

herself for having given way as she had done. "You wretched piece of weakness!" she fretted. "You should have insisted upon putting it off for a year, and you go sobbing on his shoulder! What must he think of you?"

He thought her the dearest, truest, honestest girl that ever drew the breath of life.

CHAPTER XI.

WHAT CAN ANY GIRL WISH FOR MORE?

THE pace which country-tired Madge thought had begun furiously with two balls, an opera, and a flower-show, all in one week, quickens as the season advances, and her "things" come in. Not *the* things, some of which are to be marked M.E., but such as Miss Marston may appear in without incurring the ignominy of meeting the same set of people twice in the same gown. *The*

things are being got ready with becoming deliberation, and Horace De Gray, forbidden to buy anything for his wife, finds relief in plunging into shops and ordering last year's fashions for his pretty sister-in-law that is to be. Madge is spared the ordeal of being shown about to her lover's relatives which most engaged girls have to go through; because he has no relatives except a maiden aunt who lives at Bath, and some cousins in Northamptonshire from whom she receives prim little letters of congratulation.

Fraser and Madge are model lovers. No tepid back drawing-room spooning for them. No scowling at every other He who approaches her, for him. No lackadaisical airs when he is away, for her. She puts up her face to be kissed when he comes and goes, as naturally as though they had

been married for a twelvemonth; and he, conscious of deficiencies as a ball-room man, rages in doorways and passages to find good partners for Miss Marston. Milliners, dressmakers, jewellers, claim her by day, and she is danced off her feet at night. What can a girl wish for more?

There seems to be something; after a while she becomes pale and fretful, will not be told (by Bell) that she is raking too much, but wants to start earlier and stay later than was her wont. She is even snappish with Fraser. Her new thinking-place claims her again, and mars the thoughts it makes. She lapses into brown studies in an opera box, and does not hear what Madame Estelle is saying about the old lace which good Mrs. Aymes has sent up so carefully from Beckhampton.

"Madge," says her sister one day,

"there *is* something the matter with you, and you ought to tell me."

"Dear old Bell, if you are so clever as to know there *is* something, why not find out what it is? I can't."

"You have not said a word for the last half hour."

"I've been thinking."

"I don't like to see you thinking, dear, with that face."

"It's the only one I have," Madge replies, trying to laugh.

"I don't think that is quite the way to answer me when you see I am both anxious and serious, Madge," says her elder sister.

"Well, it isn't, and I beg pardon. There" (kissing her). "But goodness, Bell! did you never have a fit of the blues when you were going to be married?"

"Many; but think of the anxieties I had! Every one against me and poor dear Horace. Nothing certain or safe."

"Nothing safe," Madge echoes her dreamily.

"I mean in a worldly point of view. It is very different with you, my child, thank God. You are engaged to a man who is young, handsome, well thought of, rich, and who loves you dearly. What can any girl wish for more?"

"To feel safe," Madge replies.

"Look here, sister mine," says the matron, putting her arm round her waist and drawing her close—so close that the little pale face falls on her shoulder—"I must be mother and sister too, for once, and you must listen to me seriously. I was a girl like you not many years ago, and know what girls are. What girls call

love, Madge, goes but a little way towards making what wives and mothers call happiness. Love is very good as a sort of lantern to look for happiness with, if you don't let its light blind you. It won't burn for ever, dear, and if it goes out before you find what you seek—a sad groping about in the dark follows. I have heard of people getting married and being very happy without what girls call love. If I had not loved Horace I should have been very happy, all the same, long before this. So if you are worried by any foolish little fears that you don't love Fraser well enough—oh! I know girls do take such fancies—pray don't let that fret you. It will all come right, and six months hence you will laugh at yourself for a goose as you are. But, Madge, if one spark of this love smoulders in the remotest corner of

your heart for *another* man—tell Fraser so, and break off your engagement. Let them call you a jilt—anything, rather than to have to call yourself—oh! something so utterly worse! Marriage with a man you respect and esteem, to the exclusion of all others, may be right—I don't know; but to wed with one and yearn for another!—Madge, it must be absolutely loathsome."

"Why, Bell dear," says Madge, looking up, "who else but Fraser have I ever had a chance to love?"

"Ask yourself—not me. How can I say?"

"Bell, dear, I will not marry where I do not love, and—and I am afraid to marry where I may bring misfortune to one I love. If I could only feel *safe!*" Madge concludes with a shiver.

"From what? From whom, when everything is so *couleur de rose?*"

"That's just it. Now you listen to me. When you were married everything was *couleur de noir*, and yet it all came *rose*. Now mine is all *rose* — suppose it turns *noir?*"

"You simpleton! Is that all?"

"Yes, that's all; but dear, when you were a girl, you had poor dear mamma to talk to, to tell you things and to ask this and that. I've been all alone with no one except Jessie and the sea for friends. Jessie is very kind and so on, but not wise—not a mother anyhow; and the sea won't answer. I have become gloomy and superstitious, I suppose, and I don't see how both of us (you and I) are to be happy when we start so differently."

"All roads lead to Rome, dear."

"Yes, and Rome is full of ruins."

"Madge, you shall go to bed at nine o'clock for the next five days and take some ether. You're a poor wee country mouse, and have got Coote and Tinney on the brain. I never heard of anything so absurd! They do call marriage a lottery, but your calculation of the chances is quite original. Goosey! why not put it this way, 'My sister makes a possibly good wife, so why should not I'?"

"I think I would be a good wife," muses Madge.

"Then, my love, all else follows, unless you marry a brute, which you're not going to do. Men are not half so bad, and far more dependent and helpless, than is supposed. Make them comfortable, take interest in what they do, don't imagine that every friend they had before they

married you is your enemy, leave them alone when they're grumpy—they will be grumpy sometimes — be pleasant when they're pleased, and you can twist them round your little finger."

"I shouldn't like to twist my husband round my little finger," says Madge.

"'Tis well to have a giant's strength, and not to use it like a giant," quotes her sister. "Besides, men like to be twisted in that way. A good wife makes a good husband, dear."

"How many dear good women are unhappy? Look at Mrs. Price, how kind and gentle she is."

"'At balls and Prince's;' yes. We don't know her at home: I mistrust ladies who carry that melancholy ill-used air about with them. She's a fool, Madge, and fools are always unhappy. You're not a fool,

and Fraser is not Mr. Price. Now tell the truth, has any one been putting these foolish ideas into your head?"

"I was asked how long I had known Fraser before he proposed," Madge replies, half-evading the question.

"'Happy is the wooing that is not long a doing.'" Bell was rich in proverbial philosophy.

"I wish I had refused him—once," Madge cooes.

"To bed at nine o'clock for a week! The case is serious!" laughs Bell. "By-the-bye, have you said anything to Horace about inviting your friend Mr. Wybert?"

"No, and I don't mean to."

"I think you're right. Papa says he has become very disagreeable, and Fraser does not like him."

"He is furious with Fraser."

"Who told you that?"

"Never mind; I know."

"These lovers! they tell everything! You see now why I hesitated about asking him here. I do *not* like Mr. Wybert, and to tell you the truth, Madge, I'm a little bit afraid of him. The sooner he goes to Barbadoes the better I shall be pleased."

Dr. Bell's prescription, or the consultation which preceded it, appears to do her patient good. Madge rests, and is thankful. By a deliberate act of treachery Fraser is made acquainted with her peculiar theory upon the doctrine of (matrimonial) chances, and teases her unmercifully. Here is a proper case for teasing; argument or expostulation would only aggravate it. She is teased till she cries, and then nicely petted round again.

So the merrie month of May passes, and Madge has but thirty days of maiden meditation left, for she has yielded to Fraser's importunities, and agrees with him that it will be jolly to have two anniversaries in one week for the future. Fraser's birthday this year will be spent with lawyers and trustees, taking accounts and signing releases. On the 29th. (three days after) he is going to sign a receipt for Madge in the vestry of Laremouth Church. Bell is to come down a week before and help the packing, for the young people (foolish creatures) are going to yacht their honeymoon, and so Madge will not want a lot of things which her generous sister provides—until she comes back.

They all make a trip to Beckhampton in state with Uncle Joe and the Honour-

able Temple Fluery, who has business with Mr. Pryor about the trust. Madge is delighted with her home that is to be, and secretly selects a thinking-place in a wood, down by the banks of the Beck. The five Miss Pryors (after brother Sam's explanation) think her a dear sweet girl, and all goes merry as the wedding bells that are soon to ring.

"Dear," she says, laying her hand softly on Fraser's arm as they stand alone in the big dining-room, "are you quite sure your poor little Madge can play the great lady here, as your wife should?"

"Quite sure, darling. Do you like the old place?"

"Immensely!"

"We will buy all sorts of pretty-pretties at Rome and Venice and Paris; and as for carpets and that sort of thing—

we'll give Jackson and Graham *carte blanche.*"

"Oh no we won't," says Madge, "we'll choose everything ourselves; and Fraser, we must not be extravagant."

"Goosey! I shall have ten thousand pounds when I come of age, and what's the good of it if I can't make a bright nest for my birdie?"

"Geese don't want bright nests," pouts the lady.

Nevertheless they go from room to room plotting and planning, accompanied by Mrs. Aymes and a huge bunch of keys, with which she insists upon opening presses and other receptacles, and dragging out their contents for inspection. She calls Madge "madam" already, and somewhat disconcerts her with observations upon the family linen. Madge is a little bit afraid of the

precise old lady, but takes the brevet rank she bestows demurely, and confining herself to safe generalities, does not make any mistakes.

Then they go to the bank, and look at the family plate and jewels there deposited for safe keeping; and some of the latter are packed up to be taken to London, and reset. As they walk down the High Street towards the station, the observed of all observers, a lady dressed in a faded silk comes in sight.

"Look, Madge," says Fraser, "that's Mrs. Wybert."

"Henry's mother?"

"Yes—the old cat."

"Oh, Fraser, let's overtake and speak to her."

"If you like, only she'll snap our noses off."

The widow starts, and almost slips off the pavement at his cheery "Good-day, Mrs. Wybert," and then turns and faces him as she would a foot-pad or a mad bull.

"Oh, it is you!" she says, ignoring his companion.

"I want to introduce you to Miss Marston."

"When I was young, girls used to be introduced to married ladies, not they to them; but I suppose the fashion is changed. I wish you joy, Miss Marston; go on as you have begun and you will be a very fortunate woman."

"Thanks," says Madge, not catching the irony of her tone. "I am so glad to make your acquaintance, Mrs. Wybert, because Henry is such an old friend of ours, and we hope to see

a great deal of both of you at the Hall—don't we, Fraser?"

Fraser winces and begins to stammer some conventionality, when the widow checks him.

"Tell the young lady to keep her 'we's' till she is married. I dislike standing in the street and have business to attend to," saying which she crosses to the other side and passes on without even a bow.

"Didn't I tell you so?" laughs Fraser. "She can't be civil—it isn't in her."

"Poor woman! Her 'tell the young lady to keep her *we's* till she's married,' was so like Henry. It was a slip, you know, Fraser. I should not have said 'we.'"

"I don't see why not. From the hour when you——"

"I understand; there is no occasion to repeat my foolishness," Madge interrupts; "go on."

"Well, from *that* time, dear, I have banished the first person singular from my mind. I always think in *we's*."

"You are so good! How happy I ought to be!"

"Say rather how happy we shall be."

"No, Fraser, Mrs. Wybert was right; I will not say *we* (for us two) until the 29th of June."

"I wish to Heaven that old catamaran had stopped at home," growls Fraser; "are you always to be snubbed and sat upon by these Wyberts?"

They get home again in time for a late dinner, and the visit, taken altogether, is a success. Fraser's manner has been perfect throughout. It did not say, "See what

things I have, and how fortunate you are to share them!" but, "See how lucky I am to have so much to please you!" This perhaps was what made Madge so glib with her *we's*.

Uncle Joe has been striding through the rooms of the old Hall, note-book in hand, marking down dimensions and sketching plans of improvement. He is one of those gentlemen who can step a yard, make a salad, poke a fire, and concoct curious drinks, against all comers. He has also, he tells Madge, an eye for colour. He will see to the furnishing. The old Hall is to be rejuvenated upon purely æsthetic principles, if Fraser will be guided by him. "*Carte blanche* to an upholsterer!" he exclaims over his claret; "nonsense, my dear boy! Leave it to me and Madge, and I promise you the most comfortable house in

England." For the rest of that evening the talk is of furnishing, till Madge (whom they persist in addressing as Madam, after good Mrs. Aymes) realises, perhaps for the first time since her engagement, that she is going to be a great lady. Yes, the visit to Beckhampton is a success, although it shadows forth a disappointment to Fraser Ellicott.

Like many careless young fellows who eat Fortune's cake with more appetite than calculation, he finds that there is a much bigger hole in it than he expected. Upon examination of accounts that ten thousand pounds about which he spoke so glibly to Madge, dwindles down to six. He had lived royally at Oxford, and has been only nominally a minor for the last three years. He cannot conceive it possible that he could have spent so much money, until

cheque after cheque, order after order, under his own hand are produced. Besides a whole row of houses on his estate have recently been pulled down and rebuilt. This was a large bite of itself into the accumulations; but would come back in the future. For the present, *carte blanche* to an upholsterer is out of the question. But after all, six crisp Bank of England notes for one thousand pounds each, is not a bad birthday present for any man—especially when he has eaten the other four.

END OF VOL. I.

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